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Log

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Two Pigeons
translated by Harry Levin

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EDGAR JOHNSON

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SIX CALIFORNIA POETS:

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ACCENT

A QUARTERLY OF NEW LITERATURE

Volume 4, Number 3

Spring, 1944

JULES LAFORGUE: *Two Pigeons*

Translated by Harry Levin

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. This story is the only unpublished piece of prose which Laforgue left completed at this death. In many ways, in its sudden transitions from grandiloquence to inconsequence, from self-conscious sentimentality to hard-boiled irony, it is a specimen of his ripest and most characteristic work. For its theme, it glances back to a fable of LaFontaine about the misadventures of a pigeon who left its mate, with a moral imploring lovers to live in their affections toward each other and not in the external world. For its psychological tone and elaborated style, it looks ahead to the novel of Proust.

"You really mean it? Then it isn't a mere melodramatic test you've been trying to impose on your poor, well-meaning Gaspard?"

"No. That would upset the good intentions of all the Gaspards in the world."

"Nonsense, Juliette. Your little heart is too light for such a heavy-handed joke, a joke which I should call elephantistic!" These quibbles were one of his two or three vices.

"That's where you make a man's mistake. My little heart is quite heavy, I assure you."

"Well?"

"I'm going to give it some exercise. I've already told you, I've been telling you for the past two days."

"And am I supposed to stand here and watch the boat pull out, and then go home? The least you can do for me is to suggest an attitude, my capricious Juliette."

"The attitude of a civilized person toward one of his equals."

"But supposing that civilized person is—as they say—out for revenge."

"Let him be. I'm not worried about your kind of devotion."

"You might at least say, 'Gaspard, I'm leaving you because you won't kill

me when I leave you. You definitely would have in the early stages of our love, and hence you no longer love me as you did.' But you leave me just to be leaving."

"Why don't you kill me then?"

"Because I'd rather know what I was doing."

"If you loved me, you could find out by looking in my eyes."

In moments of leave-taking, our throats are muffled by the very vastness of the space into which we are being precipitated. Lovers would be smothered, if they did not grit their teeth and confine their conversation to cut-and-dried patter.

Besides, Gaspard and Juliette had exhausted indoors their last and latest farewells.

Along the pier they continued to pace out their suspense.

Boys and girls were playing hide-and-seek among the piles of barrels, and getting cursed by gangs of roustabouts with blue blouses and tiny golden rings in their ears; but the curses were only a formality, for roustabouts ordinarily make good husbands and kind fathers.

Those August twilights! An exaggerated full moon, with the glitter of dull gold. A whole settlement of swallows ranging, skimming the warm water, reeling with incessant twitterings, trying to sketch their daytime patterns against the twilight as if—heaven help us!—there would never be another opportunity. Always those twilights in unfrequented harbors! A dog barking at the smell of stew aboard a moored tender, lanterns hoisted aloft to celebrate some sort of mass to the Virgin of the Waters, and masting and rigging everywhere disentangling the day in a reluctant good-bye. (It must be a strange experience, for a tree from the forest, to become a mast and go sailing away. . . .)

High above the confusion of passengers and packages, the white-cabined boat chafed at her tow-lines and fretted at the uproar. The two large smokestacks were idle, but two little funnels that ran alongside them were angrily blending their screams in a jet of pure white mist.

Just then, from the other side of the village, a bell conscientiously tolled the Angelus. It was an honest and rather stupid bell, and it seemed to be hinting: "Do as we do, my sisters and myself. Look at this village of some three hundred hearths, with a church for the blessed Lord and a little cemetery for the blessed dead. Isn't that everything? And my voice never changes, and I am well-preserved. Do as I do, children of a prodigal century, resign yourselves to the provincialism of never being anywhere else."

Gaspard, fists clenched, waited until the officious bell was through, before venturing his final plea (which was so lofty that I hesitate to offend delicate sensibilities with an expression like "clinching the argument").

"Juliette, listen. Juliette, you're all alone in the world."

"Excuse me, no more than ever."

"You won't leave like this?"

"You think it will be like yesterday? I was coward enough to let myself be argued out of it by your last-minute manoeuvres, and my baggage left

without me. You've gained nothing by that. This time you'll lose everything."

"But won't I have anything left?"

"Yes, hope, like everyone else."

A few villas were already aglow with domestic lamps, and these motionless pendants of light, under the renewed spell of that remarkable golden moon, had the effect of unpretentious jewelry, family heirlooms perhaps, or old-fashioned trinkets from the days of Queen Bertha and her spindle.

"How well these evenings suit your beauty, Juliette! And who will tell you so better than I? Juliette, in the name of the love you have sworn to me so often on these occasions—"

"I swore once for all."

"That's right, don't get excited. As I was saying, what will become of me now?"

"That depends on your plans."

Gaspard had taken a knife out of his pocket, and was using his nail to open it.

"Look here. Ask me to gash my wrists or forehead, or wound myself seriously, to prove that the sight of you has always disturbed and provoked my blood!"

"You see, you can't even open it."

"Just a minute, you'll see."

"Gaspard, drop that knife, unless you want the crowd on this pier to see me have a nervous breakdown."

"I disgust you—that's the incontrovertible truth!"

"No, it's only that I'm being reasonable."

"Reasonable is a funny word for any of the sickly, sophomoric reasons I've succeeded in wringing out of you. You can't even repeat them without laughing."

Glancing away into some fictitious seventh heaven, she repeated: "This year a peculiar phase has come over my feelings, a mad impulse to put in an appearance at the little town where I was brought up, and leave someone behind me—"

"Always there."

"Someone who has understood me—so far, at least—and who will preserve an artist's awareness of that curious creature whose life crossed his, and wonder, on evenings like this, 'Where in the wide world is she now?'"

"But it's the fable of the two pigeons all over again!"

"Not at all. Your reading misleads you."

"It's my fault for letting your imagination lie fallow, so that these rank weeds could take root in it."

"No, it's life, my feelings, my dear little native town. Oh, if only I don't die tomorrow!"

"There's enough trouble for today, Juliette. Let's go back. You can tell me everything at tea, and I promise to start living tomorrow on a new and improved plan."

"Tea, here, this evening?" She choked on the absurdity of that little *genre* painting. "When I tell you it's a matter of life and death to me!"

"Where shall I write?" Gaspard asked, after an oblique silence.

"There. Nowhere yet."

"Will you write me then?"

"Perhaps."

"Do you think you'll come back?"

"That's just it. With a past that will keep you continually mean and jealous."

"All right. I'll wait for you, my poor Juliette. You know the way."

He paused, smiling as wanly as the moon, lit a cigarette, twisted his moustache moonwards, and remarked in the tone of a connoisseur:

"Ah, charming nights are for romantic souls. Look, poetry! Are you warm enough? I fear you have forgotten your bottle of salts."

"Of course. What a shame! How foolish of me!"

"Here it is," said Gaspard, drawing it coolly out of his watch-pocket.

"How nice! Thank you. I wonder if I remembered to put a dozen photographs in my bag?"

Gaspard inspected her from breasts to knees. "Yes, and you can hand them out to advertise the beautiful freak! Good-bye."

And he turned his back and walked off, disappearing behind the customs-house in the direction of the villas. Juliette followed him with her eyes, until the fragments of her anguish were released in an expansive sigh.

In the direction of the villas, for which it was the final sound of the day, the ship's bell began to chime. Juliette hurried.

"Your ticket is for yesterday, madam. It must be stamped again, over on the other side."

On the way back, before she could cross the gangplank, she came upon Gaspard waiting beside an embracing group.

"Let me embrace you too," he exclaimed, good-bye in his heart.

"Good-bye, my dear," she said, in a discreet voice, which did not exclude a considerable residue of friendship.

He clasped her pitifully, and their mouths interpenetrated without reservation.

"Wave your handkerchief, won't you?" he concluded jauntily.

The uproar had subsided, the boat was no longer fretful, coils of dripping rope were being hauled aboard, and first wildly, then regularly, the blades of the propeller began to spank the pleasantly innocuous water, which suddenly rushed up into the evening. . . .

Juliette watched the vulgar pier recede into the lovely evening. . . .

"Well! Why didn't you wave?"

She turned around; it was Gaspard; he had embarked too. Fondly he was knotting his scarf and feigning an interest in the pair of little red signal-lights at half-mast.

"Such weakness!" she said. "Cheap buffoon! But you had better behave

yourself. You're only another passenger here, and I'm a respectable woman."

She went down into the lounge. He followed at a distance and sat down in the entrance. She walked around the room and went upstairs again. He went upstairs again.

On the rear deck she settled down into a steamer-rug with the elegant unconcern of a woman of the world, already seasoned to the gaze of fellow-travellers, apparently anxious for nothing but a cozy niche in which to think about her private affairs, in full view of a moon and a sea that were public property.

Leaning against a rail not far away from her, Gaspard lit his stubby, old-fashioned pipe and waited, never losing sight of that dear, departing profile, outlined for the moment by the moon.

"This is mild insanity," he thought. "Is she really there? And am I really here, a stranger, waiting for some kind of pretext to introduce myself? On this extraordinary boat, in this improbable moonlight. An odd episode! Undoubtedly the crisis of her twenty-fifth year, if women have such things as crises in their twenty-fifth year. Never mind, she's a charming creature. And after all, I'm madly in love with her."

The thought came in puffs out of Gaspard's pipe. He knew everything—philosophy, history, moral sciences, and paradoxes—and he managed to fuse it all into a comfortable set of ideals. That was what had originally attracted Juliette, perhaps in a mood of unhappily romantic languor. Actually the serene and lovely evening, the unlooked-for departure were casting upon his imagination all the romantic spell of an elopement which prudence would never have sanctioned. And he gradually forgot the volley of harsh retorts, yes, insults with which she had dismissed his whole-hearted appeals during the past two days. He forgot the rather serious scene that had just taken place.

"Three more hours on shipboard," he mused, "and then, in some hopeless little hotel room, I shall crush her adroitly to my bosom. Poor, wild, migratory bird! And wipe away her tears of gratitude and pardon. She does her hair so nicely!"

Juliette had always worn her hair short, with little curls at the back of her neck. And just as on previous occasions when, from the depths of his chair in a familiar drawing-room, wondering obscurely about love, he had watched her behavior among her delightful friends, so now Gaspard repeated to himself again:

"Would it not be possible to brush aside, to untangle those little curls with intimate and trembling hand? Oh, I'm not speaking for myself, but for someone! Brightly and softly looking up at you, she would accept it as the most natural thing in the world; and then she would place her head upon your shoulder, and so on."

And he remembered that, whenever he had rehearsed that outrageous obsession as to the possibility of caressing her curls, he used to cheer himself up by thinking: "After all, she's just a little animal, a charming little mammal who will grow old like the rest, etc., etc." He remembered too, that the fantasy

would habitually reach a climax: "Oh, to be alone in a room rented for the occasion! She would be crying like a Magdalene, because—she would say—I had hurt her, and would never understand her. And on the verge of further tears, she would roll her little handkerchief into a ball, and press it against her mouth to keep from crying out, etc., etc."

At this moment Gaspard looked up. In the moonlight, silent tears were glittering against the outline of Juliette's profile. "I can't stand it!"

He repressed his desire to comfort her, not through fear that she might raise a scandal (he was no longer mindful of her grim warning), but in a sudden burst of voluptuous hopes that caused him to whisper: "Soon enough, soon enough the time will come."

To sustain his patience and adjust his mood, he tried to conjure up extraordinary mirages out of the pastoral moonlight. A bit of copper deflecting a beam of this particular light, likewise deflected his reverie; it became the reflection of the lamp in the samovar that stood in the little apartment where they had spent such contented evenings. Tonight, with the house deserted and dark, there would be no tea, no lamp, no drawings, no games of checkers. The window would be closed to the coolness of the miniature garden, and the crickets would have to sing to themselves, if their hearts (their little, dark crickets' hearts) bade them.

But what could our universally admired Juliette have to cry about?

For three days, a newspaper item announcing a fatal illness had been awakening in her the poignant image of a smile of long ago, a masculine smile behind waxed moustaches; hardly an irresistible smile, the world being what it is; but the smile which had been responsible for the earliest sleepless nights of Juliette's womanhood. For three days that hypnotic smile, sinking into death somewhere across the sea, had been luring her and prompting her to embark immediately, her sight submerged in the thankless, sleepless nights of long ago. Luckily, there happened to be one of those perfectly matter-of-fact boats, which are regularly, winter or summer, at the disposal of romantic souls.

Whenever she had dreamed of imaginary affairs, they would all lead to the same situation: she dying in solitude, and the door opening at the last moment, and he—the man with the perpetual smile—coming to kneel at her bedside, telling her how she had always looked exquisite with her short curls, and imploring infinite and posthumous pardon for his inexcusable conduct on the ninth of September, 1877. And now it was she (would she get there in time?) who was going to ring at his gate in a quiet side-street, go in, cross his study, open the door of his room, kneel at the bedside of the dying man, who would be amazed by so much greatness of soul in such a frail envelope, and tell him how she had always lived for his disdainful smile, and pardon him for his venial conduct on the ninth of September, 1877! After that, she would cheerfully retrace her steps to Gaspard's villa, and tell the whole story, just as it had happened, to Gaspard.

This is what any novelist could have read between the lines of the ticket

that Juliette had put into her imitation Russian leather purse.

A lunar chill descended to the deck. Forward, a chorus of emigrants was singing with an evident lack of enthusiasm.

Suddenly Juliette got up, pushed aside her deck-chair, wiped her pretty eyes, and came over to sit down next to Gaspard. "Excuse me."

"You poor thing!" With groping hands he fondly knotted his own scarf about her throat. "When we get there you can tell me everything. Tomorrow we'll take the first boat back. Or, if you prefer, we'll go on a little vacation."

She grasped his helping hand feverishly.

"Look. I have no secrets from you. But if you have any regard for me, let me go through with this. Try to understand! If you and I are in love, it's because we're the sort of people who are commonly called romantic, who without notice would go to incredible extremes to satisfy an unconventional whim, who derive their morality here." Twice she pointed, presumably at her heart.

"I see your point. You have nothing more to say?"

"No. You will know everything when I come back."

"When you come back?"

"In a month. Don't be stingy, Gaspard. Supposing you were given only a month to create a masterpiece."

"A masterpiece! That doesn't reassure me. I want to know if you'll be safe."

"Of course. It will do me no more harm than a novel I might be reading, one that you—who are so well-read—might give me to read."

"Am I as well-read as that?"

"As nature herself."

Gaspard could only indicate, in a gesture of boundless confidence, the cities on the other side.

"You expect to spend the night alone on the express? And am I expected to spend it in the next hotel?"

"Don't worry me any further! My errand is enough of a strain. I should have left yesterday."

"All right, I'll obliterate myself. I'll wait. Really, I must be in love with you!"

They definitely seemed to have exhausted everything, but they continued to sit there in the cold. Over his heart he held her still adolescent head, so full of its portentous secret, a secret as disconcerting as a masterpiece.

The emigrants were no longer singing. At rhythmic intervals the horizon was decorated with lights. The ship's bell began to tinkle in subdued gaiety, evidently as insensitive to arrivals as to departures.

There was the station. The baggage that had gone on ahead was collected and ready for the customs. Still an hour and a quarter to waste scrutinizing announcements of boats that you have no intention of taking, etc., etc. Gaspard installed his fugitive in a ladies' compartment, and sealed with an indelible kiss those pretty lips of a child suffering from too much fiction.

Six o'clock in the morning. A cheerful red brick station at the edge of a forest of firs. The express would take twenty minutes for coffee and then leave. Already its whistle pierced the fresh solitude of the morning.

Juliette, drooping into a chair before the lunch counter, the morning paper frozen to her knees, fixed a sombre eye directly upon the ground, where they bury people. Someone was watching her, and when she showed no sign of getting on the train again he got off, muttering: "She said she would go at least as far as Orleans, and she gets off here! An unheard-of station, with no connexions for—"

It was still that absurd, obtuse Gaspard! The evening before, having sealed Juliette's lips with a definitive kiss, he had jumped aboard the same train at the last moment, despite the pledge he had voiced with such infinite resignation, because it seemed to him that the departing whistle of the express had a suspicious sound. But in his determination to dispel his doubts and to remain incognito to the bitter end, he had not yet made himself known to Juliette.

"What is she waiting for here?" he wondered, detouring around her to avoid the exit. The southern courtesy of an attendant intercepted his manoeuvre, and he found himself forced out into the open.

She glanced up at him, at this vague intruder, and turned away haughtily. Then, as the train began to move, she rushed in front of the locomotive. There was a second of agonizing hesitation, and then she reappeared on the other side, escaping across the flats.

Gaspard, who had dashed over to push her off the track, had to wait until the train had passed. Two attendants held him back while a second interminable train went by. Five minutes later, when the track was clear, and he had crossed it in spite of the efforts of an overconscientious bureaucracy, and was making his way across the flats, Juliette was nowhere to be seen.

"This thicket of firs probably conceals her from me. She must be over there—"

He ran holding his elbows to his sides, still gasping at the suicidal apparition of a few moments before.

Plunging into the thicket, he could only guess, from a glimpse of water between the freshly disturbed ferns, that there was a ditch to jump over.

"How could she have jumped over it?" he asked.

Then he jumped. A cry went up when he fell heavily into the second ditch, which was dry and covered by ferns, sprawling upon a soft, slight body, and quickly overcome by the twinging vertigo of a complete sprain.

He realized, before he fainted of the pain, that it was Juliette who lay beside him, turning her bloody and mangled face to his, and finally fainting too.

The hours of a radiant morning, as unique in its own way as the previous twilight, passed over their two bodies in that deserted pit on the flats, interrupted only by the murmur of hornets in the fretwork of ferns.

At eight o'clock they were brought back to the town in a carriage belonging to some resin-gatherers, whose curiosity had been aroused at finding a couple in that condition.

Thus Juliette and Gaspard found themselves together in a hotel room.

It took Gaspard an indefinite amount of time to recover. And Juliette was disfigured forever, her cheek badly patched up and her lovely aquiline nose now turned up. The demure angel of yesterday has become a hard-featured hag, although her complexion is still that of a peach. Such is life!

Gaspard loves his Juliette as much as ever. He keeps up appearances so well that it looks like twice as much as ever.

But Juliette knows that fundamentally Gaspard lives only for beauty, that the pursuit of beauty is his only vocation. She knows that she is demoralizing and degrading him by the spectacle of her shattered mask.

She will not commit downright suicide, but she will kill herself in little doses. It will take several months. Every day she becomes more transparent, more mechanical, as she improves her leisure by knitting thick veils.

Ah, a veil for a shroud will soon go down in the ledger . . .

It will take several weeks.

And Gaspard will unhesitatingly survive her.

ANKEY LARRABEE:

Rousseau's Ark

The wooden tigers humbly peer
Between the shallow midnight leaves.
Their puffed clown-faces pursed in doubt,
They crouch beneath umbrella trees.

A wary lion rubs his nose
Against the sleeping traveller's arm.
Puzzled by what this thing could be
His labyrinth brain takes vague alarm.

Tenderly past another wood
Lovers swim faintly through the light.
While, innocent actors in their dream,
The painted creatures crowd the night.

HORACE GREGORY:

On Paul Elmer More and His Shelburne Essays

The adventurous soul who today against reigning scientific and pragmatic dogma would maintain no vague and equally one-sided idealism, but the true duality of the one and the many, the absolute and the relative, the permanent and the mutable, will find himself subjected to an intellectual isolation and contempt almost as terrible as the penalties of the inquisition, and quite as effective in producing a silent conformity.—*Shelburne Essays*, Seventh Series, 1910.

Reading these lines some thirty years later, and almost a decade after his death in 1937, and despite his own doubts in the merits of prophecy, it would seem that Paul Elmer More had foretold the fate of his posthumous reputation. His *Shelburne Essays* have dropped out of print, and while the mention of his name reawakens echoes of respect, it recalls, not without embarrassment, the more persistent echoes of a literary quarrel of a century ago. As I speak of Paul Elmer More and his *Shelburne Essays*, it is not my intention to revive the heat of a Neo-Humanist controversy which flourished with such a violent show of ill-feeling that its moral issues were lost in the general confusion surrounding them. It was then agreed that Irving Babbitt, who was More's associate and friend, was the better controversialist, and that his personality with its abrasive force struck fire at more frequent intervals. It was true enough that Babbitt secured the greater number of converts to the Neo-Humanist cause; his zeal was no less than the zeal of an evangelist, and though its sincerity and high seriousness remain unquestioned, the evangelical temper which inspired the pages of his *Rousseau and Romanticism* was too obviously ill-suited to the doctrines of restraint and sanity that he essayed to preach. The decorous lamb of Neo-Humanism appeared upon the scene clothed as a lion, but its disguise which had been so artlessly assumed failed to deceive its ingenious and infinitely more worldly enemies; it was quickly stripped of the garments it had worn with such innocent and unlamblike pride, and was subsequently sacrificed on the altars of literary journalism.

Irving Babbitt's best writings are, of course, non-controversial—and it would seem an impertinence to defend his essays on the masters of French criticism or his introduction to an English version of *The Dhammapada*. The same may be said of More's *Shelburne Essays*, and it is not my purpose to defend them against an unseen attack, and at a distance of nearly forty years. They have weathered well, if somewhat obscurely, on library shelves, and a renewed acquaintance with them readily dispels the darker clouds of a half-forgotten Neo-Humanist controversy.

II

It can never be said that More underestimated the powers that he felt were ranged against his point of view, but he saw the prospect of "intellectual isolation and contempt" in almost the same spirit as one who secretly enjoys the prospect of an early martyrdom. We may admire the courage of his stand, but I cannot help thinking that his invitation to an "adventurous soul" enjoined his readers to share in the disfavours of defeat, and, if so, he opened an unhappy prospect for the general furtherance of his views. Even with the rewards of an inner serenity in sight, the probability of failure was far too great—and in the very decade in which the *Shelburne Essays* were written, the hopeful first decade of the twentieth century, American life was almost totally preoccupied with the visionary as well as material aspects of success: success in extending the ranges of popular education, success in achieving the practical results of Thomas Alva Edison's researches in his laboratory, success in being admitted to New York's 400, success in being present at the Court of St. James, success in the distribution of novels until they became "best-sellers," success in business, success in building the Panama Canal, and success in American affairs abroad—the success of John Hay's "Open Door" policy in China and President Theodore Roosevelt's successful mediation of the Russo-Japanese War. Against all this, More's invitation seemed more austere than it does today; and it seemed more bleak and less certain of achieving a distant victory than a contemplation of the darkest Thorstein Veblen's gloomy prophecies. It was not that More's views of the future were too black, but that they held the colorless vistas of white and gray. I may be speaking here of a superficial aspect of More's work, but it is one that is almost certain to catch the eye of an impressionable reader:

I cannot doubt [he wrote in the third series of his *Shelburne Essays*] that there are some in the world today who look back over the long past and watch the toiling of the human race toward peace as a traveller in the Alps may with a telescope follow the mountain-climbers in their slow ascent through the snows of Mont Blanc; or again they watch our labours and painstaking in the valley of the senses and wonder at our grotesque industry; or look upon the striving of men to build a city for the soul amid the uncertainties of this life, as men look at the play of children who build castles and domes in the sands of the seashores and cry out when the advancing waves wash all their hopes away.

If one accepts this as a perspective through which More saw the world, the image of Mont Blanc rises to command a view of it, and at that distance, beyond the intimate noises of beach and shore, and where the cry of a human voice, if heard at all, sounds thin and shill, one sees a wave advance—is it white or gray?—to wash away the castles in the sand.

It is at this distance, and when he is not at his best, that More sometimes fails to meet the moral issues he discerns; they seem remote, or hypothetical, or merely "literary" in the bad sense of the term, and it is as though More had seen them from the steps of the Widener Library at Harvard or from the

windows at Bryn Mawr. Throughout his essays one traces the marks of European travel, yet the paths skirt the great cities of London, Paris, and Berlin in favor of the tourist routes of Switzerland and Italy. The paths were those of an academician's holiday from which he viewed "the unshadowed splendour of Mont Blanc" in a little room with a Tauchnitz Edition of Byron's *Don Juan* in his hand. At these moments the setting always seems as though it were a shade too pleasantly suburban; even in his retreat to Shelburne's rural beauties, there to enjoy a rediscovery of Thoreau's Walden in the congenial surroundings of brooks and birds and forest greenery, the atmosphere was very nearly as suburban as many sections of New England are today. For since the turn of the old century into the present, New Hampshire has been the summer residence of the well-to-do from Cambridge and from Boston.

In a sense (and by this I do not mean that life in an American university or college is an "escape from life") academic surroundings seem to promote a slightly suburban air. In America the physical aspects of our centers of learning tend to resemble the country club, and, truly enough, many of its vital social activities are concentrated in undergraduate supper clubs and fraternities that however discouraged re-emerge under new names on the campus. By the very nature of the task that it performs, an educational institution does not present the hardest alternatives for a moral critic of American life; its realities are such that they seem unworldly to the man of affairs. Its true limitations have been seriously discussed by Henry Adams, who did not go so far as to say with John Jay Chapman "that teaching dethrones the intellect," but wrote his *Education* for everyone to read; and the limitations are sufficient to explain why no great novel, no first-rate play, nor even a document comparable to Saint-Simon's memoirs of the court of Louis XIV can come to life within them.

We may be grateful, I think, that another moral critic of literature, Samuel Johnson, so dismally failed in his teaching a boys' grammar school at Lichfield that he took the road with David Garrick, his ex-pupil, to seek his fortune at his nation's capital. How deeply Johnson loved his London is well known, but his love was not inspired nor enhanced by the fact that London was an easy place for him in which to live. We know that it was not; and by the time that Boswell met him, the poise that he had achieved was at the cost of knowing profoundly the wells of human suffering around him and of tasting their depths reflected in his own soul. At each turn of his career his gifts were tested by conflict or agreement with the best minds of his age. In this respect few moral critics (and More was not among them) have suffered or enjoyed Johnson's particular advantages—and what we value most in Johnson's writings, even in his notes on Shakespeare, is the distinctly unliterary character of his observations. In his notes on Falstaff we find the following comment and we delight in the sharpness and depth of his psychological insight:

Every man who feels in himself the pain of deformity, however, like this merry knight, he may affect to make sport with it among those whom it is his interest to please, is ready to revenge any hint of contempt upon one whom he can use with freedom.

We may feel that in some few of his literary judgments Johnson is steadfastly and, at times, cheerfully wrong. We know the limitations that were imposed by the formidable army of his prejudices, which included a dislike of Fielding and a distrust of Scotsmen and Americans, yet within the world he knew so well (and that world was at his nation's heart and was circumscribed by one of the great cities of modern civilization) the rightness of judgment remains as sound as on the day he wrote his note on one of King Henry's speeches:

Shakespeare urges this aggravation of the guilt of treachery with great judgment. One of the worst consequences of breach of trust is the diminution of that confidence which makes the happiness of life, and the dissemination of suspicion, which is the poison of society.

We cannot expect to find anything of like derivation in Paul Elmer More's *Shelburne Essays*, and turning westward from Johnson's London, we enter a more rarefied, brighter, harsher, and (if I may say so, even in praise of America's most distinguished Humanist) a less distinctly humanized atmosphere.

III

Someone has spoken—it does not matter who, for no doubt many others have made the same observation—of the delightful urbanity of the prose which graces the early *Shelburne Essays*. Urbanity in prose was one of the standards by which the nineteenth century measured its approval of an essay in literary criticism, and an early twentieth-century reaction against the arts of being urbane was natural; urbanity seemed to cover a lack of seriousness, to remind one, if ever so slightly, of the hypocritical heart that knew of neither Freud nor Jung, and yet was satisfied to beat its tattoo securely beneath a tightly buttoned-up frock-coat. In rereading the *Shelburne Essays* we are aware of their proximity to the Victorian scene in literature, and More could not deny his affection for its lesser figures, its Lionel Johnson, its George Gissing, or a forgotten poetess, Louisa Shore, but however urbane he may have seemed, there is no lack of seriousness in what he had to say. And today, now that the nineteenth century is at a proper distance behind us, we are less frightened by the presence of its urbanity than we were, let us say, twenty-five years ago. To speak of Tennyson or of Longfellow no longer awakens the discomfort that was once felt. We are in a position to see how steadily More viewed the merits and flaws of Longfellow's poetry, how careful he was not to patronize it, or to dismiss its hold upon popular imagination. In reading his essay on Longfellow, one discerns More's mingled debt to an Emersonian habit of speech and his affection for that most urbane of nineteenth-century essayists, Charles Lamb. One sees and hears that heritage throughout the essay, and its eloquence is clearly overheard in the concluding paragraph in which More speaks of Longfellow's adaptations from Dante:

We need have no fear of paying homage to a poet who wrote such lines as these. And he himself, if he did not, like Dante and his peers, build at the great cathedral of song, did at least add to it a fair and homely chapel, where also, to one who comes humbly and reverently, the eternal ages watch and wait.

Perhaps the flourish at the end of his last sentence is still a shade too rhetorical for our taste, but it was said gracefully, and after More had stated plainly that Longfellow's great weakness was in mistaking the offices of fancy for those of imagination. No critic in America has written of Longfellow so searchingly and well, and it is to More's enduring credit that he performed a skillful operation without maiming or disfiguring his patient—and the result (which is something extremely rare in criticism) is that after More has weighed the balance of Longfellow's tarnish and brass against his merits, one returns to a reading of his poetry with a keener, if more strictly limited, appreciation than before.

In his *Shelburne Essays*, More practiced the art of suspending his esthetic and moral judgments, and one waits, quite as one waits for the fall of an ax, for the place and the moment at which the sharpened edges of his discrimination are going to fall. More's temperament was far too seriously inclined to allow for a play of wit, and on the rare occasions when he did employ it, it arrives with the sensation of an overweighted shock upon the sensibilities of the reader. Something of that shock is felt as one reads his comment on Arthur Symons's verse:

There are things it were good for a man, even for a decadent poet, not to have written, and these poems to Bianca, with their tortuous effort to find the soul in the ambiguities and unclean curiosities of a swaying will are of them. They are a waste of shame.

Since we are on the subject of More's remarks concerning the "decadence" or Symbolism of Mr. Symons's poetry, I think a word should be said of More's general attitude toward Symbolism. As he wrote of Mr. Symons's "unclean curiosities," which does seem strong language to apply as one rereads a stanza or two of flaccid and derivative verse, More's position was by no means untenable. The verse is weak and one is not disposed to defend it, but when one comes across More's remark that Baudelaire's poetry is equally "unclean," a warning is sounded that we should not ignore. The same warning is heard as we reread More's attempts to elevate the talents of Lionel Johnson and Lady Augusta Gregory above the poetic gifts of W. B. Yeats. It is not enough to say that More's moral philosophy demanded a consistency that would automatically reject Yeats's poetry and the presence of Baudelaire; that consistency had already suffered a compromise in More's acceptance of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poetry and James Thomson's poem, *The City of Dreadful Night*. In respect to Baudelaire and Yeats, More's rejection of their poetry has two slightly different faces than the one he presents to Romantic "decadence" in British verse. His language is that of nineteenth-century criticism, and nineteenth-century criti-

cism was not equipped to recognize the techniques in poetry that the early Symbolists employed and passed on to their heirs. Another aspect of More's rejection of Yeats and Baudelaire is more closely related to the thoroughly Protestant character of his morality, and he was always likely to seem capricious or uncertain whenever he spoke of an Irish literature or entered the presence of what Henry Adams discerned at Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres.

In both word and spirit, More had seen "decadence" at work in a literature that started bravely enough with the Lake Poets, and declined through the course of a century to the less happy moments of Mrs. Browning, Swinburne, and William Morris, and there is no need for me to re-enlarge upon that kind of "decadence" here. Yet what of the Symbolists and their heritage which has affected every major poet who came early or late to his maturity between 1900 and the beginning of the second World War? We should admit that where More saw merely a continuation of the "decadence" that he perceived so clearly in the doctrines, the verse, and the prose of Oscar Wilde, E. A. Robinson, More's contemporary, had been refreshed by a discovery of Verlaine, and W. B. Yeats had found a touchstone for lyrical impressionism in Mallarmé. Yet the very poets who received the greatest benefit from a youthful enthusiasm in practicing the techniques and attitudes of Symbolism, also outgrew them, or so modified the original canons of its esthetic that one cannot speak of their best poetry as stemming solely and directly from its influence. What More underestimated was the hardness (with all its seeming frailty and lassitude) of the poetic imagination possessed by Yeats. In general, all literary movements, no matter what their names may be, fail to circumscribe the gifts of a writer who is fortunate enough to arrive at his maturity; but the less gifted are always left behind, suffering the limitations of a particular school, or the instructions of an early master.

If More saw little of the strength that was implicit in Yeats's slowly maturing genius, he was by no means uncertain of the values that Hawthorne's imagination brought to light, or the salutary results of re-appraising the poetry of George Crabbe. More may have been aware (but this one cannot prove) that his perception of Crabbe's merits had been shared by E. A. Robinson; if it was not, there is still room for speculation as to whether Robinson had read his essay, either as it appeared in a periodical, or after it was gathered into a selection of a *Second Series of Shelburne Essays* in 1905. However that may be, there is a passage in More's essay on Crabbe that parallels and reilluminates one of the major themes of Robinson's poetry. More wrote of Crabbe:

His own early life in a miserable fishing hamlet on the Suffolk coast, under a hard father, his starving years of literary apprenticeship in London, and then for a time the salt bread of dependency as private chaplain to the Duke of Rutland, acquainted him with many sorrows which years of comparative prosperity could not entirely obliterate. He is at bottom a true Calvinist, showing that peculiar form of fatalism which still finds it possible to magnify free will, and to avoid the limp surrender of determinism. Mankind as a body lies under a fatal burden of suffering and toil, because as a body men are depraved and turn from righteousness; but to the

individual man there always remains open a path up from darkness into light, a way out of condemnation into serene peace. And it is with this mixture of judicial aloofness and hungering sympathy that Crabbe dwells on the sadness of long and hopeless waiting, the burden of poverty, the solitude of failure, which run like dark threads through most of his *Tales*.

The setting of Crabbe's verse as More interpreted it recalls the atmosphere of Robinson's poem, *The Man Who Died Twice*, but more important than a general resemblance of human sympathy and insight is More's specific observation that *to the individual man there always remains open a path up from darkness into light, a way out of condemnation into serene peace*. This is what the man who died twice has to say even with his last breath:

"Why pity me?"

He asked strangely, "You see that I'm content.
I shall not have to be here very long,
And there's not much that I may do for God
Except to praise him. I shall not annoy you,
Or your misguided pity, with my evangel,
For you must have yours in another dress."

And with a lighter measure of poetic tact and grace, Robinson reiterated the theme in *Archibald's Example*:

"My green hill yonder, where the sun goes down
Without a scratch, was once inhabited
By trees that injured him—an evil trash
That made a cage, and held him while he bled.

"Gone fifty years, I see them as they were
Before they fell. They were a crooked lot
To spoil my sunset, and I saw no time
In fifty years for crooked things to rot.

"Trees, yes; but not a service or a joy
To God or man, for they were thieves of light.
So down they came. Nature and I looked on,
And we were glad when they were out of sight.

"Trees are like men, sometimes; and that being so,
So much for that." He twinkled in his chair,
And looked across the clover to the place
That he remembered when the trees were there.

In his temperamental responsiveness to Crabbe's verse, More is far more persuasive than in his attack on Arthur Symonds or in his praise of Mrs. Gaskell's novels; his moral earnestness which in certain of his essays seems so shrill and out of key resumes its poise as one reads what he had to say on the subject of solitude and Nathaniel Hawthorne. In this essay, and through the twentieth century's respect for Henry James (whose monograph on Nathaniel Hawthorne in the English Men of Letters series is one of the finest critical

biographies in modern literature) and by a path that More felt was the "teaching . . . of the universal protest of the human heart," those limitations, which so frequently had placed him behind the invisible line marked by the first hour struck in the year of nineteen hundred, begin to drop away. Speaking as I am from the mid-years of the century that More so heartily mistrusted, and indeed, a measure of his distrust is justified by our experiences in the presence of two World Wars, his illumination of Hawthorne's "philosophic symbolism" (the phrase is his) may seem more fashionable than More himself would have desired. To *The Solitude of Nathaniel Hawthorne* More brought those resources that he had gained in his studies of India's forest philosophers and from his well-considered knowledge of the Oresteian cycle in Greek tragedy. How pertinently he wrote of Hawthorne when he said:

But if Aeschylus and Hawthorne are alike poets of Destiny and of the fateful inheritance of woe, their methods of portraying the power and handiwork of Ate are perfectly distinct. The Athenian too represents Orestes, the last inheritor of the curse, as cut off from the fellowship of mankind; but to recall the Oresteian tale, with all its tragic action of murder and matricide and frenzy, is to see in a clearer light the originality of Hawthorne's conception of moral retribution in the disease of inner solitude. There is in that difference, of course, something of the constant distinction between classic and modern art; but added to this is the creative idealism of Hawthorne's rare and elusive genius.

This, I believe, is one of the happiest of More's analogies, and as he speaks of Hawthorne's "rare and elusive genius," I doubt if there are many better examples, such as More has given us, of an artist's dual responsibility to life and art. The very theme of his essay seems to have touched a hidden spring in More's imaginative life, and the images that rise from it are those that show the subtle likenesses and contrasts between the peace of solitude and the terrors of human isolation.

It is in this vein that More wrote his essay on *Nemesis, or the Divine Envy*, in which the instruction, *Think as a mortal*, runs as an obligato through its theme. The instruction itself is a familiar law of ethical discourse, and if restated baldly it has little meaning to the modern ear, but it was More's intention to renew its life, and as in his essay on Hawthorne's solitude, he calls on the spirit of Aeschylus to illustrate his text.

With implacable zeal the Erinyes hunt down earthly glory that vaunts itself unduly. So in the play of Aeschylus they exclaim: "The vanity of men and their pride that toucheth the sky,—all this melteth at our dark-stoled approach, it wasteth away unhonoured under earth." In these fearful daughters of Night the Greek beheld the penalty that overtakes those who forget in pride or madness to think as mortals: and woe to the man whom some higher law impels to disdain these avenging deities, whether it be a Hamlet of the modern world driven on by conscience and ghostly apparitions, or an Orestes summoned by oracular voices to confront their wrath in pursuance of a sterner duty. And woe to the man whom the gods have endowed with superhuman wisdom, for to him also the grace of heaven is not without peril.

I think I am not far wrong if I assume that the tone of these remarks is

scarcely that of one who is merely an accomplished reader in comparative literatures—something else is there, and I believe it to be the voice of a man who had come to speak a sermon. The voice was heard when Samuel Johnson wrote his *Life of Richard Savage*, and it was decidedly less agreeable to the ear of the reader twenty-five years ago than it is today. I think I am not wrong when I say that we are less frightened by More's approach to his subject than in the days of revolt against the Puritan tradition in American literature; to admit that men are less than gods does not infringe, I hope, upon those liberties which have survived the events and the emergencies of the past thirty years.

The preaching of a lay sermon is, of course, a dangerous practice for any modern writer, and his greatest danger (which may arrive as a tribute to his gifts) is to become the leader of a literary cult; it was that misfortune which attended the latter years of D. H. Lawrence's life, and within it there are many open trap-doors through which the unwary writer falls. To find and perhaps to preach sermons in stones may have done very well for the companions of the melancholy Jaques in Arden's forest, but we remember those sermons best when they were recited as conscious parodies of their devotions, and in that old play it is the clown who rules the scene.

As one rereads More it is not difficult to recall that the best of Emerson's prose writings were those that could be read as though they were delivered from a pulpit, and I think there can be little doubt that it was More's intention to strengthen, even though it seemed to narrow, the vein of Humanism which runs its course throughout the somewhat amorphous and certainly all-embracing teachings of Emerson. The failure of Emerson's idealism was one of the contributing causes of the tragic failure of Woodrow Wilson's position at the close of the first World War: could we say that in his moment of pride Woodrow Wilson failed to think as a mortal?

There is much that might be written of More's quarrel with science in his *Shelburne Essays*; it was not a happy quarrel, and as I have said before, More was not a fortunate controversialist. His concern was that of a moral philosopher whose sensibilities responded to the "truths" that had been revealed to him through literature, and in particular through the poetic literature of the Anglo-American tradition. Poetic "truth," of course, is of a different order than scientific "truth," and the difference between them has been best said in Mr. Basil Willey's study of *The Seventeenth Century Background*:

For in poetry thought is not pure, it is working in alliance with the feelings and the will. In Bacon's phrase, it "subjects the show of things to the desires of the mind"—which is the exact reverse of the process called science.

It is better to recognize the moral "truths" of literature as a process in reverse of a non-moral aspect of scientific thinking than to insist, as More did, that an irreconcilable quarrel existed between them. The actual "truth" that More conveys to us (and that reality is implicit in his essays on Nemesis and Hawthorne) needs no apology—but here the question is not an academic one, and is, as it should be, closely related to those ancient "truths" which are con-

stantly refreshed and given an enduring life in poetic literature. Here, the proper relationships between man and man and gods and men are not to be denied: and is it a paradox to say that More realized the fulfillment of his moral "truths" only when he restored the practices of moral criticism to the dignity and seriousness of a fine art?

Someone has said, and with a lightness of inflection that made the statement seem disarming, that poetry itself is a moral art. And so it seems to be in the Protestant tradition of an Anglo-American literature. The statement explains to some degree the depths of More's perception as he regarded the values of Hawthorne's "rare and elusive genius," for Hawthorne, like Henry James, is among those writers of prose whose art existed within a world of poetic realities. In his interpretations of Aeschylus and of India's forest philosophers, Paul Elmer More shared an insight of that world, and in his application of the precepts from ancient sources, one rediscovers their reality in American literature.

One word more. As the present century reaches its meridian, to be humane, and to be aware that the wrath of Nemesis pursues the would-be conquerors of our world acquire merits that had been forgotten before the arrival of two World Wars. And to be humanitarian in one's desires seems to be associated with too many of the mistakes that we have made. The broad wave of Humanitarianism itself seems to be slowly ebbing in its strength. It has spread too thinly, for the trials of the present century are not washed away by it, and there is too much evidence of wreckage on its shores. If I may speak plainly of a conflict between two words that has gone on longer than anyone cares to remember, let us say that the virtues of being humane have more inherent strength and a deeper penetration into a true knowledge of the human spirit than the transient rewards of the humanitarian impulse and its facile disillusionments. But as More once wrote, "these questions that touch man's deepest moral experience are not capable of logical solution; indeed, they lose all reality as soon as they are subjected to dogmatic definition." The knowledge that we truly seek is how to live, and to do so we turn with More to those realities that the Greeks perceived in the presence of Divine Envy and that Hawthorne saw when he wrote his fable of *The Minister's Black Veil*. It is in these terms that the answer must be read, in the very image of Nemesis, in the tragedy of Orestes, in the story of Job's trial, and in the maturity of Adam's knowledge as he left the garden of Eden.

PAUL BARTLETT:

Log

Seven minutes for the yanked-off leg of a spider to stop jerking; fourteen days for a palm frond to unroll; three years for my ship to rot. I should put that in my log.

They laugh at me when I go ashore. They joke about the old man and his ship. I've heard the lies they tell about my ship.

I should have scuttled her. I should scuttle us yet, send us to the bottom some damn night.

We swivel on our anchor chain; the mast lights burn; we're a fine target for submarines but no sub pokes her torpedoes into this bay. Sand-dunes, that's what subs look for here. They're right. We've got sand-dunes, lavender and yellow ones—like those in the south seas.

How many? Eighteen years. Seventeen years since Tenerife and Papeete. I had the Brisbane then, Brisbane out of Liverpool, twenty-two knots. She thought dirty weather was a cat's paw.

Lord, lord, haven't seen a ship for three years. It's true. Maria Martha, fifteen tons, carries bananas. Corsario, Pirata, Dorado, Navidad II—sure, row-boats. No crowded quays at Havre, no more slipping up the Tyne, no more races for the dock in Sydney.

Lord, we've been here three years. I've got that in the log. Three years. Same anchorage. Swing with the wind. Rot. Lie in my bunk and think.

In the town where I was born . . . it was fun to go to Barcelona on a burro. . . .

We permit you to retain command. Your skeleton crew will be competent Mexican mariners. . . . Your country is at war. . . . We are a neutral nation and being so declared will not permit your ship to leave port. . . . We afford you anchorage until the cessation of hostilities and . . .

When I copied that in the log I thought we'd soon get free, thought we'd get a permit and be used along the coast.

We left Lisbon with eight hundred passengers, weather clear, wind southwest, barometer. . . .

I felt we were getting away in the nick of time, didn't want my record blackened, had a full list, papers in order. Then they held us in Havana, the fools.

He was sitting in the lee of a cabin. He was slender, tall, grey headed, blue eyed, clean shaven. He wore a frayed tropic uniform, the uniform of the B-T-line. It was clean. He cleaned under his fingernails with his jackknife and then stared at the sea beyond the rail.

The sea was blue, quiet. Far out at sea was an island. It had sunk into the blue of the quiet water, the haze of afternoon. On clear mornings or on windy

days and often just before dusk it appeared—a thin line of yellow beach topped by a faint smudge of blue trees.

The small boats crossed the bay very infrequently. Around a prong of sand lay Vera Cruz and its harbor. Sometimes he had his men row him there. He liked the simple lighthouse tower, liked the harbor approach, the fumes of oil-soaked docks.

He leaned against the back of his chair and squinted at the sea; he squinted out of habit; he wasn't thinking of what he saw. He heard footsteps. It was a peddler. He had brought coconuts.

"Take them to the galley," he said. "You've brought some nice ones."

The native was a good-looking fellow.

"My son's better," he said.

"I'm glad," the captain said.

"You were kind. . . ."

"Put the coconuts in the galley," the captain interrupted. He went to the rail and looked down. The fellow's canoe was below, where he always roped it. It was a hollowed cedar log. The wet cedar glistened along the gunwale.

The captain sat down and took out a pack of cards and began a game of solitaire. He had a board and he used it as a table—across his knees.

Red king, black ten, black ace, black four, black two, black eight, red three.

He laid aside the ace and placed his red three on his black four.

No letter from Spain for seven months, wonder how things are, what do they think has happened to me, to the ship?

He had stopped playing; he leaned back and looked at the quiet sea without thinking about what he saw.

She said she read in a newspaper that we docked in Havana. But she didn't know about Vera Cruz until I wrote and then all mention of the ship was cut out of the letter. But the house wasn't bombed. But some fool's going to say I've been torpedoed, knocked out by a Stuka. Yesterday, in Vera Cruz, we were bombed and strafed by six . . .

He went back to his solitaire. The cards refused to budge and he leaned on the arm of his seat and then the bell sounded for dinner. He went at once to the officer's mess and sat down. There were windows along his table and he could have looked at the shoreline but he did not look out. He thought of what he had seen while walking to the mess.

There were insects running along passageways . . . there was a grasshopper . . . there was dust . . . rust on doorknobs . . . 326 open . . . Somebody's been in there, stolen a pillow, stolen a light bulb. They drop things over at night. Slit a mattress, drop wool into sack, canoe below. We've all seen it happen. . . . Hello, what's this? Hey down there! Nobody answers. Canoe's gone. Hear somebody run in the night. A door slams.

"More coffee, Luis."

Somebody got some of my keys. They'd like to get in all the staterooms—if they dared. Lord, that man was crazy in the head. Just stood in the salon. Had to get help to get rid of him. Crazy business.

"Remember the woman in 408? You were here then, Luis. I don't see how you could forget her. Thin. Hungry. Sick. How long did we keep her on board? For five weeks! Was it really five? She was grateful enough. You say you saw her, just a few weeks ago, well, well. Is she all right? Well, I thought she'd die. Kept us busy. What did you say, Luis?"

Luis was small, young, jerky-motoned. He had grey eyes and black hair and wore a neat chef's outfit.

"Go ahead, Luis, buy what you like for supper. I won't be hungry. You know I don't eat much at night. Walking the deck's no longer conducive to appetite. It'd be all right if I could forget rust on davits, on standpipes, rails, plates; I was down in the engineroom yesterday. Those poor motors."

He tried to think of something happy to say to Luis. He looked out the windows alongside his table and saw a rowboat going shoreward; something bulky in the stern made him think of a dog.

"Remember the dog we had on board?" he said and smiled. "Never did find out how the hell he got on. I heard him yapping in the elevator; I couldn't believe my ears." The captain laughed.

Luis said something but the words meant nothing to the captain. He was thinking of the motors, of his efforts to save them. He had worked on them hours, hours that had added up to days.

He thought of his concerns during the months following anchorage. (Luis had gone to the kitchen.) He had never been faced with so many problems at one time. He had tried to protect rugs and carpets, curtains, shades, shutters, drapes, drug stocks, food, barber supplies, books, chairs and davenport, machinery, radios, navigation instruments, life-boats, pots and pans, light bulbs, wines and liquors, rope, rigging, cables, blankets and linen, pulleys, screws, refrigerators, linoleum, dishes, silver, clothes, uniforms. He had walked miles every day. He had made lists, shut doors, opened cupboards, he had growled at his rings of keys, sent radio messages, drained oil, worried over pressure gauges, siphoned gasoline, poisoned the rats.

He and his crew still fought rats.

He had five men, three for the day shift, two for the night. He worked them hard. He had had tough goats, irresponsibles, idiots; two had been capable. He always tried to get the incapable ones off his ship but the marine office in Vera Cruz was lax, was always cheerfully negligent.

What do they know about an eight million peso ship! Pesos, lord, they don't know how to count higher than seventy. Seventy a month, if they get that much they're damned lucky. If they knew how much I've got on board they'd sink me.

During the first year he made it a point to check his safe once a day.

He finished his dinner and went into the library, sat down, got up, went to the bridge, looked at his canvas-covered instruments, went to B deck and sat down. He thought of his bunk, of a hammock on A deck. He remembered his cards and took them out of his pocket and shuffled them and put them back.

The sea was a deeper blue. There was no wind. The island was non-

existent. There were no boats on the water. There were no sounds. Then the anchor chain creaked and a yard rattled.

He thought about letters from Spain.

I suppose the garden's in bad shape. Of course they've got the same old bean poles; the hop vines need pruning; the garbanzas need water; the potato bugs are bad . . . never saw them worse.

He fell asleep and then woke with a start: he felt the ship was listing. He glanced at deck and then back at the sea, closed his eyes.

A Mexican seaman pattered past, barefoot. He didn't speak. The captain heard him pass, didn't speak or open his eyes.

I'd like to prune the lime trees. Let's see, let me think; how old are they now? Twelve. Nineteen. Twenty. They're older than that. Got them from Rodriguez when Leo was five. Leo's twenty-nine . . . Leo hates Catholics. I warned him; mama warned him.

Let me think, couldn't they get me a letter here by way of a Red Cross ship?

He felt the ship dragging against current and a slight breeze. Anchor chain scraped in its eye.

He felt his love for his ship, felt it throb behind his eyelids. He thought of scuttling, thought of weighing anchor, disappearing. He imagined himself somewhere offshore, in a new sounding. He'd nurse her, anchor, up-anchor, take her to South America.

His great-grandfather had been a pirate and he thought of him. He felt his grandfather had never loved a ship as much as he loved this "big tough." He loved the salons, the two pianos, the tapestries, the fine Spanish canvases.

He loved to see his ship jammed with strange faces, see curious stickers on luggage, see lovers mooning in the night shadows of lifeboats.

He had met his wife at sea.

He got up and went to the bow and looked down. He longed to see the pilot boat chugging out for him at home port. A muscle twinged in his arm: he wanted to lift his arm and signal.

He leaned on the rail.

There was a breeze and he was glad of it. Heat of steel deck and heat of sun were oppressive. He wished he was young enough to swim.

Two of his seamen were below, talking softly. How vividly he remembered the government internment of his Spanish crew . . . launches . . . good-byes . . . He looked at shore and shoreline became port: there were the docks, piles, crane, the blue-white shipping offices, ships; then he remembered that he hadn't seen a ship for three years.

His ship was twenty-two thousand.

He turned and looked at her. She was modern, trim, had one smokestack, two loading cranes, directional radio antenna . . . She was clean. They might scrap her tomorrow but she was clean: he had insisted on that. Dusty, yes. Rusty, yes. But no grease. No stains.

He went back and sat down, took a cigarette, lit it, let it die out. When it was cooler he walked the deck. He went to bed early and slept heavily.

In the morning he found the safe had been tampered with. The dial was not at 19,000. But everything was much the same: someone stole something, there were weird noises, there was a cigarette butt in the radio room, he woke in the night and heard his ship's motors running, heard the screws turning; the weeks passed.

He went ashore and tried to replace an inefficient seaman; the marine office was uncoöperative; the chief petty officer was amused and curt. He went to the post office. There was a letter from his first mate. He had been favored and had a job in Mexico City. The captain had missed him keenly and now each word evoked the fellow, his lanky dandyism, his heady profanity, his trick of chewing his underlip.

Is it true they're going to scrap our ship? he wrote.

The captain's doctor visited him and they sat in the radio room and listened to a broadcast about the latest German defeat, listened to the news and then to music. There was Spanish music . . . The captain pointed to the small Velasquez he had hung over the transmitters.

There were hot days; there were nortes; there were days when the little island got a kind of black mane; he walked the decks, went ashore; there was always a chance that mail might get through.

At the marine office the petty officer handed him a letter and he went outside to open it; he stood on a tarry dock and the norte pulled at his shabby clothes; it had been choppy crossing the bay and entering the harbor. His clothes flapped, he looked at the choppy waves.

Potato bugs, hop vines, garbanzas, where?

He tried to fold the letter, shoved it into his pocket and walked slowly back to his boat. He nodded to his rowers and somebody shoved off and the oars dug water. So that's why the tug's in the harbor, that's why they didn't oblige me about a new seaman. Throw me a towline. Might have let me bring her in under her own power. . . . Throw me a towline!

Of course the hull's rotted. Barnacles. Of course she's in bad shape.

I'll put the date in the log and copy the letter. I won't write down the name of the tug. . . .

Come on, you fools, row more carefully! Ever see a rowboat before? By Jesus, I'll bet you never did. Row, you bastards, act like you knew an oar from a chunk of driftwood. Lord, I never saw such men.

He pulled his officer's cap over his eyes and shut them.

"Is the Manuel B to be scrapped?" asked the man at the tiller.

STANLEY BURNSHAW:

Walt Whitman

Essay in the Form of a Letter

I used to read your book and hear your words
 Explode in me and blast new passageways
 Deep in my brain, until its crowding rooms
 Held more light than my head could balance. Now
 That the tunnels all are cut, I pace the rooms,
 Looking for you, though certain I shall find
 No more of you than you yourself could gather
 Out of the pieces of self. The years have burned
 The sharpness from the edges; I can fit
 The pieces, but the mortar must be mixed
 Out of our blending wills. Others have tried
 And failed. I too shall fail if I forget
 How thought can range beyond the last frontiers
 That common sense has civilized with names.

(10)

Others who look for you have made you say
 Words you might have said if they were you,
 And lost you in their passion for a phrase.
 The private man's infinitude defies
 The singleness they look for when they strive
 To sort your various colors to a scheme
 Of thought-and-action. Desperate for pattern,
 They make the key *Calamus* and they twist
 Your other selves about the centerpiece,
 And lose you in that love.

(20)

And others forge
 A key of social thought that cracks apart
 When words and action disagree: *Walt Whitman*,
You said you love the common man! Where were you
When Parsons' friends were hanged? Were you asleep
Or writing more brave words about mechanics
And farmers? How much cosier for you
To prate about democracy than live it—
You, its self-appointed poet!

(30)

Others,

Seeking you in your plangent celebrations
 Of science and the holiness of flesh
 And earth, end with a fierce *You too, Walt Whitman,*
You flinched, you stumbled, hankering for a "soul" . . .
The substances of sense too harsh, too bitter
A truth for you to live by! Underneath (40)
Your protest boils the soft romantic sickness
Of all our Shelleys, Heines—bright lost leaders
We hoped were men! You were afraid of the dark:
You who had thundered "Science is true religion,"
Sang the groveler's wooing song to death
And God and Spirit! . . . Hide, at least, the image
Revealed: the gaudy chaos of a man
Unworthy of his faith!

But who can dare

To arbitrate the depths of you that anger (50)
 Against your tranquil self? I am not certain:
 I have seen the signposts of contradiction
 Planted by men impotent to discern
 The harmony beneath the subtle wholeness,
 And in their self-defense erect confusion
 On quiet entities. A poet's words
 Are signatures of self—the many selves
 Subsumed in one profounder sense that feels
 An all-according truth: a single eye
 Discovering the countless constellations (60)
 Of heart and mind. Wherefore the syllables
 Reach outward from the self in an embrace
 Of multitudes. The poetries of speech
 Are acts of thinking love; and I must find
 The thought that grows the center of your passion.

And so I say to those who precontemn
 The message of *Calamus* as the flowers
 Of twisted love, what Plato showed of truths
 Uttered by poets. And I say to those
 Who spit upon your social thought: "*Respondez!*" (70)
The human race is restive, on the watch
For some new era—some divine war—
Whose triumph will entrench a brave good-will
Among the common people of all nations—
Those trodden multitudes for whom you clamored
A new and tender reverence.

But for those
 Who sneer because you looked for lights beyond
 The planes of sense, there is no final answer
 If they deny the mind its birthright freedom (80)
 To range all worlds of sense and thought and vision.
 "Everything that can be believ'd is an image of truth"—
 The images refined to great and small
 Will cluster into orbits of belief
 And hold together as the planets hold
 By kinship and denial, in one vaster
 All-encompassing circle. Let the sneerers
 Proclaim your chief intent, or keep their silence
 Until its name is found.

It is not found, (90)
 The answer to your central search—"the problem,
 The only one"—*adjust the individual*
Into the mass. For we have just begun
 To fit the world to men—men to the world—
 And we shall stumble till the single heart
 Discovers all its selves and learns thereby
 How singleness and multitude can live
 In valiant marriage. With your hungry hope,
 You pierced the shells of feeling: trumpeted
 Into your country's ears and flooded strength (100)
 Into the wavering hearts of men lonely
 For courage to fulfill their need: to thrust
 Their single faith against the massed-up wills
 Of many. "Sing your self," you told them. Listening,
 They pledged the valors of the inward man.
 And others turned from you with dull, deaf ears,
 Afraid to listen, waiting to be taught
 The trial-and-error way of rats in a maze . . .

A poem "is," some men believe. I say
 A poem "is" when it has spread its root
 Inside a listener's thought and grows a tree there (110)
 Strong enough to burst a room in the brain,
 And bring its branch to blossom. Then the host
 Forgets the verse and ponders on the mind
 That made this seed of growth . . . As I forget
 Your poem: as I strive to learn your mind,
 Thinking that when I come to understand,
 I may begin to touch serenities
 You saw beneath the springs of pain that nourished

Your world that was beginning—dim, green world
Trembling with death-and-birth—divinest war.

NOTES:

Line 18. "In all my lectures," wrote Emerson in his diary in 1840, "I have taught one doctrine, namely, the infinitude of the private man." Compare the opening lines of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*.

Line 29. Parsons: one of the seven laborers sentenced to death in the Haymarket Square incident in Chicago, 1886.

Lines 70-76. "Respondez!" appears in complete editions of *Leaves of Grass*. In his unpublished "The Eighteenth Presidency," a broadside written in 1856, Whitman set down: "What historic denouements are these we are approaching? On all sides tyrants tremble, crowns are unsteady, the human race is restive, on watch for some better era, some divine war." In the preface to an English edition of *Specimen Days*, Whitman emphasized as the "basic-phrase" of all his writings: "Good-will between the common people of all nations." "A new and tender reverence" are also Whitman's words.

Line 82. Blake, "Marriage of Heaven and Hell."

Lines 91-93. Traubel reports Whitman's statement: "That is the same old question—adjusting the individual to the mass. Yes, the big problem, the only problem: the sum of them all."

Lines 100-105. Traubel said, "Do you mean that a man who cannot take his own advice is bound to be a failure?" Whitman replied, "That's the substance of my philosophy . . . I wouldn't make it a stiff-necked rule, I would only make it a rule." See also, Haniel Long, *Walt Whitman and the Springs of Courage* (1938).

EDGAR JOHNSON:

Satiric Irony

There are two methods possible to satire. One—the method of Voltaire and Juvenal and Shaw and Dickens—is to ride straight upon the enemy and plunge its weapon in his heart. It avoids resentment and reprisal by courage, by comedy, or by violent eccentricities enabling us to label it, if we choose, as irresponsible lunacy. That is direct satire. The other method is more devious. Instead of meeting the foe on the field it may seem to be a neutral and undermine him by suave and diplomatic ways. It may spy out his weaknesses under the guise of an innocent bystander, it may masquerade as a friend or as one of his own defenders, it may enfeeble him with the opiate of false praise or insidiously destroy his faith in himself. Such is the strategy of Anatole France, or, in a milder vein, of Jane Austen. It is indirect satire.

Of all the devices of its secret enmity, irony is one of the most potent. And irony is closely akin to satire itself. It is not identical with satire in spirit only because irony may be on occasion what satire never is, an instrument for covert praise. In pretended indignation against a gift from a lady, Swift affects to regard it as an attempt at bribery: “Your present of butter was made . . . as a known court practice, to grease my fist. . . .” And he threatens her with his “revenge”: “I will let all the ladies of my acquaintance know, that you . . . are so mean as to descend to understand housewifery; . . . and this will give you as ill a reputation, as if you had been caught in the fact of reading a history, or handling a needle”; worse still, he will swear her letter is “written in a fair hand, rightly spelt,” so that “every female scrawler” will sneer that her “writing and spelling are ungenteeled and unfashionable, more like a parson than a lady.”

And again, “Mr. Thomas Heartfree,” Fielding writes in *Jonathan Wild*, had “several great weaknesses of mind, being good-natured, friendly, and generous to a great excess,” and “was withal so silly a fellow that he never took the least advantage of the ignorance of his customers”; and Fielding continues throughout the book to speak contemptuously of Heartfree’s “low and pitiful behavior” in yielding to tender emotions or governing his conduct by unselfish standards of morality. This is a part, of course, of the more pervasive irony by which Fielding never ceases to laud Wild’s “greatness,” and contributes its flavor to Fielding’s mordant analysis of the difference between “greatness” and “goodness.” Granted that there are in both these illustrations background-tones of antagonism to others, their primary aim is nevertheless to praise. They thus serve to establish the fact that irony is not limited to condemnation.

Irony is dissimulation, the ironist a dissembler. “Last week,” writes Swift, “I saw a woman flayed, and you would hardly believe how it altered her appearance for the worse.” The impact of this appalling sentence is derived in part from the way in which Swift dissembles his horror to a pretence of

disinterested wonder. When, in Charlie Chaplin's motion picture *Modern Times*, the feeding-machine into which he is strapped goes insane and begins smashing the soup plate repeatedly in his face and violently scrubbing his mouth with the ear of corn like a dentist's revolving brush, the effect is both horrible and screamingly funny. In the hilarity, Chaplin has submerged altogether his implicit point. But it is the witty irony that gives force both to Swift's dreadful picture and Chaplin's satire on modern industrialism. "Punishments like these are supposed to be administered in the interests of human welfare, to make people better; see how much 'better' they made this poor creature, and compare the actuality with the blind complacency of your usual assumptions." "How efficiently benevolent is our capitalism in its care of the worker, using all the resources of technology to coddle him with the speedup and cram machine-kindness down his throat, literally choking him with good things."

The method of dissembling in these, as in all irony, is that of consistent understatement. Chaplin's machinery, of course, is burlesque, but in its wild exaggeration he dwindles almost to disappearance the overt statement of his real meaning. Irony steadily says less than it means. From this is derived the popular conception of irony as confined to saying the opposite of what one means. For if one continues to say less and less of what one means, it inevitably follows that one also says more and more of what one does not mean, until the intensification of understatement results in inversion. Classical rhetoric had names for the verbal forms of both inversion and understatement. The first is called *litotes* (N. E. D.: "a figure of speech in which an affirmative is expressed by the negative of the contrary"). *The Rape of the Lock* supplies an example of litotes when Belinda screams her horror at the loss of her ringlet of hair:

Not louder shrieks to pitying Heaven are cast,
When husbands, or when lapdogs breathe their last.

The second was labeled *meiosis* ("a figure of speech in which the impression is intentionally conveyed that a thing is less in size, importance, etc., than it really is"). Meiosis may be illustrated from Artemus Ward: "A bean pole, legitimately used, is an instrument of good, yet if it be sharpened at one end and run through a man it will cause the most intense pain and perhaps produce contortions."

Irony can be used with the utmost subtlety, but it is essentially a very simple quantitative device, like exaggeration, of which it is at once the antithesis and the twin. From one point of view every irony is also an exaggeration. "The law in its majestic equality forbids the rich as well as the poor to steal apples from pushcarts and sleep under bridges." The very sentence that purports to bring out the law's equality to all shows up a thumping inequality. But is this done by *exaggerating* the evenness with which it holds the scales or by *understating* how hard justice is to obtain for the poor? The same statement simultaneously embodies both, and in it irony and exaggeration are one.

This does not mean that there is no difference between France's subtle depreciation of the law and the bitter hyperbole of Dickens's attack on the Courts of Chancery. The distinction lies in the relationship between what is meant and what is said. Just to make it harder, let me put it this way: Irony understates what we do mean and overstates what we don't mean. Exaggeration understates what we don't mean and overstates what we do mean.

The telltale weakness of France's illustrations, of course, is what gives away his true meaning. Were it not for them, this might plausibly be the very utterance of some reckless admirer of the law's operations.* Our enjoyment,

The Law is the true embodiment
Of everything that's excellent.
It has no kind of fault or flaw,
And I, my Lords, embody the Law.

in fact, of his irony proceeds to some degree from imagining some inflexible jurist falling into France's trap and taking his ironical praise literally. "An irony has no point," William Empson remarks in *Some Versions of Pastoral*, "unless it is true, in some degree, in both senses; for it is imagined as part of an argument; what is said is made absurd, but it is what the opponent might say." Irony is thus more legitimately entitled to be called "double talk" than the gibberish going under that name in recent years. It is meaningful in two ways, on two levels of perception, and presupposes, as H. W. Fowler puts it, the outsiders who, "hearing shall hear and not understand," and the happy few who, "when more is meant than meets the ear," are "aware both of that and of the outsiders' incomprehension."

The distance between the two audiences is the measure of the ironist's subtlety. The cruder and more violent forms of irony need the reader to suspend his disbelief in the existence of an audience so dull or callous as to uphold the surface meaning. Butler writes with cutting sarcasm:

What makes all doctrines plain and clear?
About two hundred pounds a year.
And that which was proved true before
Proved false again? Two hundred more.

There are men who live by these principles, but we are certain that any such would be too cautious to avow their cynicism; our pleasure, therefore, is derived from imagining the fox thus caught in the open. It would be hard to find an audience to believe that Fielding meant his ironical panegyric of "greatness" and his derision for goodness, but it is the invention of that audience that enables Fielding's irony to ring out like an angry gong. It is possible, on the other hand, for the ironist to cut things too fine: the distance between Defoe's ironical suggestions in his *Shortest Way with Dissenters* and what the more ferocious persecutors really felt was so infinitesimal that Church of England fanatics fiercely welcomed a brutal leader and dissenters were horrified at an

*Cf. the Lord Chancellor's song in *Iolanthe*:

even more savage voice joining the rest of the pack; the uncovering of his hoax alienated both sides.

Defoe had merely carried injudiciously far an important characteristic of all successful irony: the pretense of innocence. There are, of course, unconscious ironies that really are innocent. Children speak such ironies when they are unaware of the meaning their words will have for an adult audience; King Lear's words have a special and tragic irony when he says,

I am a very foolish fond old man
Fourscore and upward, not an hour more nor less;
And, to deal plainly,
I fear I am not in my perfect mind.

By the appearance of innocence the ironist gives the impression that satire was far from his intention, that any unveiling thus achieved was less of his engineering than inherent in the circumstances themselves, that the facts, as it were, constituted their own satire. This is naturally much more persuasive than if the satirist seemed to be calling our responses for us. We have the pleasure, aided by the satirist's invisible hand, of detecting the prey and bringing it down for ourselves; and if the satirist manages to seem very naive indeed we may even flatter ourselves that we have seen through deceptions by which he appears to have been taken in. And when we no longer subscribe to this delusion we are not enraged, for we have now penetrated the ingenious trickery of a very clever fellow, and the cleverer we are in having been able to join his sport. The whole process of understood irony is a delicious massage to our vanity.

Irony is for the audience that either is or imagines itself to be a superior and fastidious minority. To such audiences it can bring exquisite enjoyments: the economical dispatch of the enemy, the skill and finesse of a difficult process, a delicate cruelty, self-esteem fed and rewarded. It has corresponding disadvantages. When it is not perceived it may seem to its readers and victims merely to be stating what for them is a truism, and all its wire-drawn treacheries leave them unaware that they have been betrayed. Sometimes, however, the existence of irony is smelt without being understood; the response is apt to be a baffled resentment, bewilderment mingling with the feeling that the satirist is a smart aleck, a wise guy, a self-superior snob. But when his irony is not understood and then gets explained, let the satirist beware. That was what landed Defoe in the pillory.

The deepest irony is born when the two audiences, the élite and the victimized, melt into each other. We may not go so far as to believe that any legal system achieves perfection, but all of us more or less assume that laws tend toward the administration of justice and that respect for law is a mark of the virtuous man. It is therefore a shock to have Anatole France suddenly thrust forward a fundamental inequity running through all systems of jurisprudence. We laugh at anyone simple enough to have been taken in by this pompous sham; simultaneously the realization crashes home that we are that silly fellow ourselves. "It is when the ironist himself begins to doubt . . .

that the far-reaching ironies appear; and by then the thing is like a dramatic appeal to an audience . . . ” But the two parties, instead of existing separately in the audience, as Empson implies, are both incorporated within every one of the auditors.

The conception of irony here adopted enables us to understand its significance in other combinations, “dramatic irony,” “Socratic irony,” “ironical cheers,” “the irony of Fate.” Dramatic irony appears whenever we are sharply presented with a blindness that causes the actors to overlook or misread some aspect of their circumstances so that they construe as favorable what we perceive to be ominous—that is, underestimate their own peril. In comedy they plume themselves upon their very weaknesses or remain complacently unaware of the ludicrous figure they cut in other people’s eyes. Socratic irony, by a profession of ignorance, manipulates such pretensions to their undoing. For those who knew their Socrates, the fun lay in a game whereby the knowledgeable fellow who admitted that he knew all the answers would be turned inside out by the mere simpleton, a game whose stages they could follow with ironical cheers. “And the best ironical cheers do not mean ‘obviously you are wrong,’ but ‘obviously we can grant that; taking the larger view, your argument is in our favor.’ ”

The irony of Fate, finally, is not a mere cliché for the strange or unexpected. It confronts us when in the very event that seems to gratify our dearest desire there is hidden a crushing disaster. Saying little at the moment, it has already made itself part of the irrevocable past before its undertones are heard. Oedipus obstinately and hot-temperedly determined on pursuing the investigation from which both Tiresias and Jocasta try to deflect him is an example of dramatic irony, and what should be the triumphant solution of his problem—the discovery that he himself is the criminal—an irony of Fate.

Irony then has larger bounds than are enclosed within salt phrase or epigrammatic sting. The single word may distill a delayed poison and the stroke of an ironic aphorism be mortal before its sharp edge has inflicted any pain. But the larger ironies are cosmic, they are entwined in human fate; and it is these that are even more significant to satire than any mere technique of slippery insinuation. They may inspire the insights that shape a satirist’s entire design. In their depths may lurk the springs of his philosophy. The method of *Candide* is a ferociously hilarious mockery, but its strength lies in Voltaire’s ironic perception of men’s blindness to the cruelties among which they pass their lives and their indifference to the sufferings of others. The method of *Penguin Island* is that of parody, but its core is its ironic deflation of history and its golden vision of progress. Irony has been the animating spirit of the skeptical philosophers among satirists. In their hands it has been not merely a device for shaping words into swords. It has poured the air and sunlight of reason into dark places, disinfecting them of the superstitions that germinated there.

Six California Poets

JOSEPHINE MILES:

Program

Martin on every block
Is in luck,
Here's time for belt buckling.
What music says so?

The stained glass organ raining down
Its pelts over noon town?
Maybe.

The tooter at the bridge, puffer at the bay,
Bird in the marsh at pay day?
Maybe.

The tyke balloon bargains, staying away from the pins,
They promise, till the waft begins?
Maybe so.

The coming together at the goal line which means to press
The full tide roar of a major success?
Maybe yes.

The natural sounds of far out foreigners,
Brook water, wave washes, wind whishes and such stirs?
Yes again.

These airs in the block, what they carry amazes,
To each his own traces.
Does one single one ever hear all these musics?
Maybe. Maybe so.

Prophet Tongue

Left to its town the tongue bickers and stalls,
Hears itself inept greet, gross and alone,
The tongue tacker loose and wandering in the town.

A big space, though, filled with metropolises,
Stuffed with one dawn's worth aspirant breeze and blow,
Makes of the tongue more demand than grand hello.

Gets up that little speaker and orations it
Till it purls over the plain, lo, lo, listen.
Come back to your crackerbox, wagger, and hush now.

GEORGE P. ELLIOTT:

Music

Music, I think, for some like you
Makes passage over those erosions in yourself
That keep you hard and dry.
Permits the intermixing which must bear
Fulfillment that movies or the mystery books deny.

Allows the bed (before your wife gets in)
To feel the lack
Of your Eurydice, gone
To a murk whence you could chant her back.
You never followed.

Releases you from fighting with your childish swords
The deathless snipers of your childhood:
"Those things are nasty, boy."
"What have you done, sir?"
"Worthless."

Remembers, and allows
Again the search for what your youth looked for,
Sometimes, for what you are.
Nearly the only ladder any more.

C. E. AUFDERHEIDE:

Accidental Death

As once bamboozled heaven was
 So now the law is tourniquet
 The stricter parts the strictures press
 Faith's flow, from abstract to delight

And what prevent? The passive waste
 A brighter agony than faked?
 Stoppage, pushing back the past
 What anyway was always lacked?

Such: by repeal the whole lets flow
 A penured passage, man to god
 The eked-out left between the two
 Spent, drained, no longer loved

Poem for Traitors

Wherever traitor turned, his blood he found
 Spattered on wall, pooled on floor
 According to whatever escapade
 Was there where he became aware

How much had been betrayed
 Those monuments arose, odd pokes
 Toward Heaven's own, own blood
 The acts 'come memory as jokes

Declared then with the optics of recall
 Of schism of the radical and tame
 His heart, that powerful drab, that dull
 Because of both his death, anterior, and name

Beer with a Stranger

The belated claptrap which confines us here
 Untimely nuisance, occipital, remote
 Jerks churchbell, a verberation beer
 Sends amber circles, sounds the note

Is time and not time's product
 To be not judged by eager overall
 Nor passive guild actor but the act
 Which lifts the bottle, able ale

A scapegoat drop, a drizzle fooldom
 Shocks us to complete, to terminus
 But no motion makes us anyway to come
 Or go; we drink the end of us

Locked, stock! And barreled over
 Into an afterwards which swelled
 To trillionths of the belly of the brewer
 The tined and golden age down-swilled

All Smithereened Apart

Hey, Meagre, after exaltation, what?
 All the doors folded back, the large room
 Larger, a step into vastness, then
 To the horizon, eh, and after that?

The atoms will never separate, the rule
 Is opposite of wish, all run together.
 Listen, Scanty, even as you distribute
 Distances gather into a new whole

Affection for Conception

The affection for conception rouses
 Distils (what can memory recall?)
 And the fingers spread the wide flesh
 Flashlike; slow as light the coil
 Coils, and the concept closes
 What of affection is in the flashes

To be defined. The memory slips
 Slow sloop in mild and rises
 Relatory and to the senses given
 As is given scent to heavy roses
 Defined while meaning sleeps
 Close to whatever is of heaven

Text Today for Milton

“ no, no, I feel
 The link of nature draw me: Flesh of Flesh
 Bone of my bone thou art, and from thy state.
 Mine never shall be parted, bliss or woe.”
 Book IX, *Paradise Lost*

More than ever which is more than most
 The seeking goes until the end is lost
 The bliss begins and what is natural
 Is eligible, and finally, too tall

And thus the woe demands its state of mind
 A kindness lacking any other kind
 Part and parcel as the saying goes
 No end to this, the cumulative woes

Flesh pressed to flesh expecting (droll)
 The likely soul pressed hard to likely soul
 But these! So distant that the running mouse
 Of mind is lost and locked in the soul's house

GERTRUDE MAY LUTZ:

Concept

See: in the pallid distances, the star,
 Its light a shallowness against a shuttered earth;
 And the shepherds standing in the bloody meadows
 Lean their blindness upon a bladeless sword,

Bringing their minds back to beginnings:
 O, know this emptiness!

Look now: divide the years:
 This field is midnight lost with sheep, and camel
 Caravans line the east and no shape of them:
 Even their bells sounding with brittle silences.

O, where are the wise men,
 The moon-round saddle bags?

“Others May Starve . . .”

(Occupied Territory)

Here is the well drunk dry—
 The earth a cracked lip.

They come: bellied drums of emptiness,
 Their hands like twigs shrunken:
 Come to fall at the dry-rot rim
 And their eyes fold down.

Then the waiting ones rise in their shoulders,
 And their bills open like scissors;
 Swift they leave the skeleton tree:
 Black on black plummet towering dust.

Out of this day is night now:
 Out of this night, the glutted,
 Even the last beakful of flesh . . .

And the moon decays on bones spoking a hollow axle.

VIRGINIA RUSS:

Dragon Pageant

Rows of tin-foil feet lift
gilded into ballets of flying fish
moon-nicked in the wedge of the ship's wake

and the dragon's jaw boom-swaying
ripped like the sail of a schooner
his scarlet snarl steaming
between the turrets of his teeth

as rose snips might move through a twig
his cleaver spine shears steel cables
while the bobbling of his head shakes blue butterflies

his tail gnashes
with the grinding of sand in trolley rails
his coral spine rippling caterpillars

copper doughnuts slung on a broom handle
his coils loop around the lamp post

from the calla lilies of his ears
geyser green fires
while his eyes swallow gold fish

through old soapstone caves
curving like the canals of the ear
winds the slow grey smoke of his anger

screaming purple flames, demons burst
through the domes of his eyeballs

the hydrochloric fumes of his wrath
sing the telephone wires with flies' wings
tight green bud heads of serpents
the fumes glide around the carrot towers of bricks

while firecrackers
bloom lions' tails on his tongue

The Roots of Dreams

In these valleys, the strong chew on live coals
and wet their blackened tongues with bitter water,
the others become bleached bones beside old wagon wheels:—

(headless necks, pierced with needles and wearing hats,
birds' heads wearing shoes,
organ tubes woven of spears,—blunted, grey,
to be whistled upon by stovepipe winds,
buttons for porcupine hides,
rattlesnakes,—their backs studded with nails:—)

As a medicine show magician, clawing into a shabby sleeve,
whips out a fan of crimson silk,
a stumpy barrel of grey spine
drawing within its gnarled skin,
pushes out a globe of flame impaled on knives:—

(or doorknobs grown together,
round clustered like the multiple breasts of
Ephesian Aphrodite,
the nipples crusted with stilettos:
what child will suckle these?
what shape may he take who drinks thorns salted with alkali?)

Piling fibers against the doors of their pores,
the cacti barricade their stems against the lean pumas of drought;
and the necks of old miners who hide out in cracks on the mesa
are corrugated like the hollow stones of dry creeks.

A horny trunk of cactus, long, white,
grey-fuzzed as an ancient desert rat
walking along phantom ridges
chasing down Peg Leg's mine
through lava folds of the Panamints;

With green sand in his teeth,
his red eyes see the mountains ooze at their base as ice cream cones melt
the cornucopia of sand hills spilling a vast lake of sweet water
whereon a galleon spreads its violet shells of sails
and ginkgo trees whose reflections shiver
in that coolness of blue
dig no roots in earth:

and he finds more truth in the shadow of their shadow
 than in cream-beige dust of sand-papered miles
 or the lumped borax, hard-packed under his cracked boots

Bird Woman

Azalea-cool air
 dreaming off the water rocks:
 where I gathered choke cherries and the black stones of berries:
 under the tasseled shadows of ferns
 sat the red bird on her nest, small as an ear:—
 a twig cracked and I thought of the beaver
 whose teeth crunch march roses and the roots of willows:
 then the stink of stale bear grease
 smoked through the berry thicket and I saw their scalp locks
 jerking like the crests of woodpeckers

Last night I dreamed of the bead woman who strings white shells:—
 Now, in his beak of agate, the hawk pulls the
 blanket of the night's wolf skin off the silver sleepers,
 the morning's grasshoppers scatter around my ankles
 I, Saca-ja-wé-ah, launcher of canoes

With the babe in his basket to my back
 I walk like the two-headed jackal
 my nose sniffing towards salt water
 while his eyes watch the lodge-pole pines slip backwards

My moccasins are rubbed with the summit of mountains
 and I have seen the nostrils of the buffalo god
 move with blue clouds,
 while rope geysers of the sandstorm
 spout behind the sulphur cliffs of his hooves,
 (the hump of his shoulders shaggy with pine trees)

The chieftains are tall standing into the wind
 the feathers of eagles, whirling on their shields,
 but it is this squaw, who gathered the silver rods of dry wood,
 who pounded the years of soap-root,
 this squaw, who leads the captains to the shoreless waters of salt

Adventure in Suspension

Revolving, heavy as a laden noose,
 the elevator rope swaying, as the gate clanged to
 with the scratching of fingernails on a blackboard
 the floor rose, heaving and quivering, between walls quivering
 like the cheeks of old men who sit on the steps of the public library

a box dangling on a string, rancid butter squeezed upwards through
 a tube
 a verdigrised penny shaken through a coin slot, rattling against leaded
 grooves

she was in blue
 just me and you
 a coffin for two
 by the grace of invisible pallbearers, ascending
 my friends I'll be telling
 cosy and smelling
 of stale cigaret ashes and
 spittle-wet butts trodden into the corners

the banana oil smell of
 her cheap pink face powder
 and bruise-blue peonies
 inked over the dress stiff with old sweat
 as she smiled moving closer wriggling pear-drooped buttocks

and the box trembled
 tentative between floors oh god
 to stick here for hours perhaps hovering between the second and third
 infernos like Dante between the worlds and she baring black teeth and
 moving closer, the green hair-like moss under the drooping hat poppies
 the rouge stucco smeared on the dark crusted skin
 peeling back plaster
 a rotting apricot which has bounced on the ground and the pallbearers'

hands twitched us
 slowly slowly by frayed rope
 oh better better to fall, crashing like Lucifer
 clutching at comet tails and falcon feathers

slowly slowly the salve out of the tube

and the peek-hole of her mouth minced companionably
awful today ain't they?

oh are they?
yes person don't know who they're rubbin' hips with these days
ridin' nexta the crowds nowadays
they're bad today lemme tellya
the crowds drops them
drop what?
why dearie, the loaded dice of her teeth tittered, why dearie
the fleas

All Is Light

The angel whose torso is of rice husks, hollow,
bound by tinsel, wearing half a barber's basin of a halo,
she, benignly a-tip the tree, twig-poised like a sparrow:

Above sprays of blue lights, like Maypole streamers,
shining through water-pale white cellophane, enhancing
stripped paper with the implied dignity of glaciers

Blue-glinting the halo's blade curve, and the straw angel's unripe apple
face,
fountain-looped tree reflecting waterfalls through the window's cleared
space
under coffin folds of blackout curtain lacing

Sky-ily mist magnified, from room's multiple warm breathing, magnet
to moisture on the glass,
home pudding rum englamoring:—
while across the street, the sentry,—hollow wells echoing in his boots,
—pacing:—

Past guns pointing to stars, within Islamic crescent of cement bags
to rows of jeeps stacked like playing cards, and boxed armored trucks
soundless as folded accordions, at the far end of the block

He stamps one foot, then the other, to stir the clotted ink in his legs
up to Fort Gunnybags, down Reconnaissance-Wagon-Row to the rail-
road track:
up, sleet of the blade wind hacks at his cheek beard; down, the wind
prods bayonet butts into his back

Collar up, saucepan helmet down; harbor patrol boats comb the black
 water with dragnets, while a rope of light whirls a blue lasso around
 the dock
 and with searching surgeon fingers prods

For lesions infected and festering with spy
 pulses seaward, blinks, revolves a long blue shoreward rod
 digging under piers to gouge out a saboteur

as a barnacle clinging to the underside of wharves is pried
 off as the tide ebbs, and with azure daubs the brass knob of the sentry's
 helmet, anointing his pinched shoulders, as he moves within a pillar

of light, like Marley's ghost; he, square-heeling the wind-wintery
 pavements, succubi of the fog insinuating against his skin, within his
 coat's cloth
 as he dips, clam-lipped, through the beam's bath

ETHEL FORD CARROLL:

Story Teller

The pendulum throat beats time to water,
 And all the leaning faces kiss the flames.
 Through a film of crabs
 The hammer rain
 Lowers twin coffins.
 Tonight the sea is a black clock,
 Its ghosts come ticking.
 Tomorrow apricots will show between leaves,
 And the rain will be yellow stains on tree ladders.
 But tonight the fruit pickers around the fire
 Are pirates
 Who have ships to bury.

HYMAN SCHWETZOV:

The Trip

Charles hadn't slept a great deal on the train; he had been too excited. Now his small face, long and pale, assumed the look of the feeling of fear that had come suddenly out.

He had been to Boston before. It seemed to him, alone, to take on a crackling newness. The marble pillars hid something. Uncertainty made him pause and go across the marble where his loneliness increased because of the glassy look of things; he felt he was being stared at through the case it formed around him.

His mother had always approached a taxi madly. The driver seemed to know where she was going. Charles started to run, duplicating his mother's rush, but he felt the driver knew this and he stopped. The driver opened the door and Charles stumbled in.

It was too dark to see where he was going but the city seemed to have the same feeling as New York; after coughing out this information to himself, he fell asleep.

After he had been prodded awake and carried upstairs, kissed by an old lady slightly taller than himself and put to bed, he could remember only the kiss and the rich aroma between his lips and hers.

He accepted the experience of waking in his own pajamas, in a large room, entirely soft-carpeted, with the large windows partially covered with heavy drapes, as he did any experience his mother had given or shown him. The bed was warm and comfortable and he stayed in it as he would have been allowed to had he been at home. His mother often stayed in bed for a long time. She recognized this instinct in her son as hereditary and, since it came from her, let him lie. In his home he was always quiet, a little jar half-filled with a liquid that rarely slapped against its sides.

Even now he moved a soft slender white foot from the bed as though he were afraid he might spill something. He discovered on looking out that he was in the gambrelled third story of a house that looked like all the other houses around it, staring out to a peaceful iron-rimmed park.

After Charles had washed and dressed he opened the door to go downstairs. Outside, a small candle burned on a table, the darkness surrounding the light with jagged edges. The floor, the bannister, the doors continued down the corridor and disappeared. The floors were carpeted here, too.

Quickly Charles shut the door behind him and ran down the stairs, down another long hall and down more stairs where the small woman stood waiting for him.

The wrinkles of her face lifted in surprise . . . What is the matter? . . . in a light voice held down with a heavy accent.

Charles blushed . . . I . . . was afraid.

Her face did not have to go far to resume its natural expression—a larger wrinkle, in the center of her face, curved.

He sat at breakfast as he did at luncheon, with three women. His mother's "friend" (he could not discover how or when and therefore could not see his mother choosing this woman as a friend—she would not be one of his) and another woman still smaller than his mother's friend. Her mother. He could not quite understand what they said, they were so strange. The other woman, to his left, had her hat on and talked generously, and on her he put a name because she reminded him of someone he knew. Then, promptly, he tried to forget them all.

The dining room was lit even in the early morning from a green-shaded lamp suspended low over the table. The light was never bright and from where he sat on a low chair he could see one small bulb shining.

Wandering from the room through a spacious high foyer into a sitting room, Charles found the atmosphere the same. It was like the bottom of a deep well. He might have been living continually with memories caught between two leaded panes of glass.

His mother's friend came in some time after and suggested he take the air, putting in her voice the line of demarcation between his sex and hers. Charles looked out of the window. Obediently he slipped from the chair.

The texture and color of the day hadn't changed. He had never seen the house from the outside and his eyes followed the brownstone facade up and down until his attention was caught by a small sign in the first story window. He grimaced a little and read: *Rooms for Rent*.

He walked around the park as he would have walked around himself. He felt among the trees the same serenity he felt when he was alone. And now he was even more serene: he knew everything. There was no doubt about this woman's relationship with his mother, and he thought of it with a certain fastidiousness.

Entering the house was like passing through all the shades of black.

During lunch he became slightly nettled when the loquacious one began to give off a feeling of being vexed and saying so in so many words (though she said nothing about her vexation). Now and then she muttered under her breath.

The landlady was pouring wine from a tall dark glass decanter. Embarrassed, one movement seeming the cause of the other, Charles lowered his eyes to his plate, perfectly aware when he raised them that the glass had been emptied and was going to be filled again. He lowered his eyes again to the plate. His mother had never approved of women's drinking, and he remembered this with the touch of glass on glass, and the gurble of liquid as it spilled, it seemed, into the cavity of his ear. As she sat, the landlady stiffened in her chair and swayed through the meal. The loquacious one talked, oblivious of the fact that she was not answered.

Grateful to be able to leave, he finished his milk, excused himself, and went

into the sitting room, pushing one of the armchairs near the window. By degrees he lowered himself out of sight into a book. The other armchair creaked and sighed; there was a faint rustling of silk, the rasp of paper on wood, and a slight wind from the turning pages of a magazine. The woman with the hat had come in. Charles tried to look at her with the top part of his eyes, but she was staring at him and he had time only to notice that now she wore no hat and that her chair was nearer to him than it had been.

He read hastily, disturbed to tenseness from being watched, disturbed because a faint hum was taking the place of the letters on paper. He looked up. It was as though she had snapped down the lid of a box.

I want to put you next to something . . . Casually she rose and moved to the sliding doors of the parlor. After closing them she sat down again.

Don't let her . . . she shrugged her shoulders, shifting her eyes to the closed doors . . . make you do things. She's like all landladies. Give them a finger and they take the whole hand . . .

And you know how foreigners are, always keeping wine in the house . . .

Charles stared at her red middle-aged face and boyishly cut hair.

She has barrels of it, barrels. She drinks all the time . . . She waved her hand. The same hand straightened the jacket of her suit.

She'll do anything to get you to do something for nothing. For instance, when I first moved in . . .

Charles was pleased at the idea of a story.

. . . I asked her to clean my room and she said she would. That's simple, isn't it? . . . without waiting for an answer . . . I moved into the next room. I waited, of course, but she did it so slowly I decided to help. I wanted to get settled . . . Do you know what she did? . . . The woman stared at Charles, who shook his head . . . No sooner did I start to help than she walked right out of the door and didn't come back . . . I . . . she closed her eyes with indignation . . . I cleaned the room myself . . .

But wait . . . Charles stopped moving . . . She said she would get a boy to help me. He was no boy. He was a man . . . Her voice stopped high and came down . . . He was drunk. She gets him drunk. She gives him all the liquor he wants . . . Her voice lowered and became low with hatred and disgust . . . And you can see *he* has all the earmarks of a gentleman . . .

Charles stared. He couldn't understand, but in him a gaseous vapor of fear began to form. He had been listening so intently that with her he began to form a hate that distended the landlady to a vague but horrible meaning.

You are not feeling well. You had better go home . . . her voice softened. Charles came to himself with a start. But she hadn't been talking to him . . . So I sent him home . . . Then, no sooner finished . . . It's good you are not staying long. This house is a morgue.

She talked on, telling him about her life, asking him polite questions, become unusually formal after the first outflow of confidence. The constant vacillating between being a grown man and a small boy tired Charles. He wished she would go.

It was almost dark when she left the room. Charles waited until he thought he heard her climbing the stairs and then he too left. He seemed to hear voices behind him and he hurried into the lighted dining room, shivering. The house was a morgue, he thought.

The door leading from the dining room into the kitchen was open. He heard movement there, and as he stepped forward curiously, a man's voice came to him, gentle, precise. He did not move. The house had fallen into a deeper silence, entering him, making him as sensitive as a tuning fork. A masculine voice said . . . Thank you . . . and a woman's voice answered it, coquettishly. That was the landlady's voice. And the other was the gentleman's—with all the earmarks, Charles thought, fascinated. His mind leaped like a satyr from thought to thought. This was the man . . . who . . . His mind would not stay still. All the half-formed words that were spoken and held at the same time when he was in the room, all the glances, long, slippery, directed sometimes toward him and sometimes toward other things—they all came back. He could not stop them.

At supper Charles looked as little as possible at anything but his food. After it was finished, the immense fear of the emptiness and the gloom almost prevented him from going upstairs. Now he was really afraid to go up, but more afraid to stay down and listen. He didn't want to hear anything.

While he had been thinking, he had come up the stairs into his room. He undressed quickly and slid into bed, and was no sooner covered than the landlady came in. She seemed to know when he was getting up and when he was going to bed, and she came in so quietly that she made of her entrance something full of tact. Charles could appreciate it now.

Are you all right?

The words fell down on him as she bent over. Charles stiffened, rejecting the slight winy touch of the lips to his rigid cheek. The whole afternoon flooded to him. He could not understand why his mother had sent him here except for him to learn these things that were so formless and yet filled him with unspeakable fears and thoughts.

Outside, the stairs creaked as though two people and not one were descending. She had switched off the light beside his bed, but he put it on again, aware of the darkness that enclosed him, of the flickering candle outside the door. His feet were cold against the sheets; he wanted to cry. He thought he heard something, someone walk up the stairs, and when a door closed he started to cry.

Someone had been in his room and put off the light. Startled, he realized that he had fallen asleep and that someone had entered his room. His door wasn't locked and he didn't dare turn the key. Bitter, he went back to bed, angry that he was not permitted to do here what he was permitted to do at home.

He couldn't bear the thought that came to him that he belonged here, that he was born here, and his mother was a dream. The thought of his mother tantalized him, and he became afraid to go beyond the ambiguous events that

seemed to find their cause in her. His mother was a dream. And she—she was kind because his mother paid her to be kind. His thoughts swirled and changed in front of his eyes, approaching, departing in flaming sentences, and the image of his mother and that woman became mixed and their faces leered at him.

He awoke the next morning happily until through the haze of sleep he realized where he was. Dressing sullenly he walked about this room trying to explain to himself this lump in his mind that he could not melt. Angrily he walked down the stairs.

He ate breakfast with the spring inside of him tightening. He knew he could say nothing, do nothing. He could not even think or stop from thinking. Things happened without his having any control over them. The frustration, the bitterness of an experience he could not fathom, still held him. His hate flowered from his anger, frustrated by all the conventions his mother had taught him. For the first time, he began to doubt her word.

The landlady coming down the stairs interrupted him. She held his suitcase out to him with a smile, and he took it shuddering with aversion. She had touched the clothes he wore next to his skin, and the thought became unbearable to him.

The taxi was standing at the curb as they came out. He waited for her to say something. Instead she embraced him and he shuddered again. He knew she would feel the movement and with a rapid twist he disentangled himself from her arms, the emotion coming to his throat and no farther. Tears sprang to his eyes, he pushed her again, opened the door of the taxi . . . Go away! he suddenly shouted. Go away!

PAUL ROSENFELD:

Rimbaud and Musical Art

A singular and satisfactory song-cycle for voice and string orchestra, specially demanding the attention of those who are seeking to measure the immense potency and effectiveness of the personality of Arthur Rimbaud, was performed in New York late in February and produced an authentic sensation. The cycle, called *Les Illuminations*, is an integrated, diatonic setting in the original of several of those visionary, gloriously lyrical or ecstatically stammering poems in free-verse or prose by Rimbaud which the poet appears to have called by the French term both for colored plates and flashes or sudden bursts of inner light.

The piece begins with trumpet-like, crude and rapid flourishes for strings in different tonalities, evoking an atmosphere of rapture, hallucination and transcendency; and the singer cries "I alone hold the key to this savage parade!" There follows a setting of the bulk of the phantasmagoria "Towns" with the swiftness and vehemence of transcendental experiences; and an extremely *lento ed estatico* setting of the ethereal "Phrase" beginning "I stretched ropes from belfry to belfry," in which the voice sings now softly, now loudly against a diaphanous background of harmonic tones. Then to a staccato, leaping *allegretto* suggestive of "pipes and timbrels and wild ecstasy," comes "Antique," the startling close-up of the hermaphroditic demi-god, and, on a majestic *allegro*, "Royalty," one of the expressions of the feeling of deification; and the aerial lyric "Marine."

During a speeding intermezzo, the singer again cries, "I alone hold the key to this savage parade!" Now follows one of the prose-poems with English titles, the dazzling realization of a beloved dream-figure, "Being Beauteous," on a broadly, passionately chanting *lied*; and to the rhythm of a macabre march, the Goya-like "Parade," the vision less of the underdog than of the leering brood of passions in the shadows of the unconscious. Once more the singer cries, "I alone hold the key!" and on the words of "Departure"—"*Assez vu . . . assez eu . . . assez connu*"—the singular and rapturous piece dies away.

Its composer, one of the few younger composers whose style, while presenting itself with hard modern outlines, reveals spontaneity, possesses individual color and a certain passionateness, and sings frankly and conveys emotion, is the young Englishman, Benjamin Britten—born in Lowestoft in 1913, the son of a dentist; trained by Frank Bridge in composition and by John Ireland in piano-technique. Britten was in New York several years ago and left the impression of a personal modesty and affability as unusual in composers as it is in Englishmen; but American performances of a number of pieces by him gradually have been assuring us of his talent. The first of these performances

was the broadcast of Britten's *Requiem* for Orchestra; another the production of *Paul Bunyan*, his chamber-opera—unfortunately on an opaque text by the poet Auden; a third, that of *Les Illuminations*—as in the last February performance at the hands of the Saïdenberg Little Symphony. Yet another was the presentation of his string-quartet, here this very January. All performances displayed Britten's forthright lyricism and fine "feeling for color, for nuance in orchestration," his intuitive sense of the special power of each instrument; and those of *Les Illuminations* and the string-quartet in particular, his gift for the articulation of experience mystical in form. The quartet for example musically plunges one into the "Celtic twilight"—far more deeply too than any composition by that other musician of faery, Britten's teacher Frank Bridge.

The composer, at present, is in England—rapidly becoming famous through *Les Illuminations*. Here at the time of its first performance the work for unknown reasons woke displeasure in Virgil Thomson, the composer who is the New York *Herald-Tribune's* music critic. After the second performance, the paper chronicled only the bare fact of the repetition. The rapturous piece doubtless has its limitations. One cannot consider it, sturdy as it is, the equal of Debussy's settings of Verlaine, or other settings of symbolist verse such as those of poems of Mallarmé's by Ravel, or Schoenberg's *George lieder*. Britten is little of an inventor; and though his choice of material in *Les Illuminations* is more tasteful than it was in the *Sinfonia da Requiem*, *Paul Bunyan*, and even in the String Quartet, it is still short of distinction. Nor is he strikingly ingenious in his manipulations of his material. Yet the cycle rings true, utters a unique experience, creates psychic tension and satisfactorily releases it.

Merely as a Rimbaud-setting, the piece is of importance to the poet's appreciators and judges; since every setting, every art-song attests and embodies an influence of the author of its text; and Rimbaud's influence is an element of these critics' prodigious topic. Every *Kunstlied*, that is to say, displays variations in musical form and structure determined to a certain extent by the language and meter of the text and the emotion expressed by the words. In Britten's score, Rimbaud-critics for instance would encounter exceedingly novel passages in the vocal line: slow and colored passages including singular little groups of quite disjunct, staccato soft notes recalling the sounds of panting or gasping speech or stammering in dreams. The novel passages would present evidence of having been suggested by portions of the text. This evidence is their occurrence only in the declamation of ecstatically confessional lines modulated by quivering emotion. The critics also would discover an individual structure in the score: a singular, artful alternation of the savage in mood and movement and the dreamy and exalted; a juxtaposition of heavy march-rhythms and dragging or ecstatic rhythms; and abrupt juxtapositions of inexpressivity and extreme expressivity. Again, they would find an abundance of simultaneously delicate and clear and bright higher string color—clear bright harmonics, sibilant tones *sul ponticello*, and frequent trills, glissandi, tremolos and flying flourishes. And reasons for an attribution of the novel structure and delicate and modern string-color to Rimbaud's influence would also grow plain. The

total structure and the color would be seen giving their inevitable musical form to feelings which, if not originally roused in the composer by the mingled savagery and rapture and the exalted pitch of Rimbaud's lyricism, must nonetheless have been pointed and established by them in him.

What must be equally of interest to Rimbaud-critics is the fact that, like every art song, *Les Illuminations* embodies as a means to its own unity an interpretation of its text, a musical emphasis of aspects of it. This emphasis in instances is extremely revelatory. But the piece embodies an interpretation of more than its text. It presents wellnigh illustratively a feeling of the figure of the poet himself—for which reason it makes its special demand on the attention of critics. Unlike most art-songs, Britten's cycle is an instance of objective lyricism. The majority of song-cycles of course—Beethoven's *To the Far Beloved* and Schubert's *Winter-Journey* for prominent example—place the center of emotional gravity primarily in the composer and ourselves. They are subjective lyrics. A much smaller number, Schumann's *Woman's Love and Life* and Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, for instance, project that center, place it in some object of the mind's. They practically are dramatic lyrics and monodramas. In this group there rank the objective lyrics, the cycles which, like Schumann's *Poet-Love* and Britten's *Les Illuminations* and his setting of sonnets by Michelangelo, hold the mirror up to the poet whose work they set, perhaps ultimately to the very idea of the Poet, but primarily to Heine himself, or Rimbaud himself, or Michelangelo or whoever happens to be the writer. The singer who stood among the fiddles in one of the performances of *Les Illuminations* was a soprano; in the other, a tenor; yet in both cases the delivery of the music gave one an almost physical image of Rimbaud himself in the act of his tall lyricism, and a sharply emphasized, almost matchless sense of "the beggarly boy with a fire in his brain that fretted the roofs of his dream-castles with gold." That is to say it was Rimbaud, "a spark of radiant Nature," in the act of "creating all the fetes," out there before one. It was the sublime hooligan, rivalling, in the glow of genius and an ecstasy of autistic and godlike independence of Creation, God Himself in calling forth a secret universe of "new flowers, new stars, new flesh, new language" sonorously from his own spirit.

Equally important is the fact that as a consequence of Britten's piece being the first, at least the first successful and conspicuous, Rimbaud-setting, criticism is now obliged to take into account a Rimbaudian influence on musical art augmenting the poet's already colossal influence on modern poetry, from Claudel's through Guillaume Apollinaire's to Hart Crane's and that of the latest surrealist poet. Hitherto, criticism had been able to speculate on the existence of a Rimbaud-influence on music, although merely the slightest of circumstances has justified it in doing so. The circumstance was this. In despairing cynicism Rimbaud had set down in that confession of his own immense, tragically loveless and joyless being, *A Season in Hell*, his derision of the art treasured by society and his preference of "maudlin paintings, stage-sets, the backdrops of mountebanks, old inn-signs, popular prints, erotic books

innocent of spelling, the novels of our grandparents, and *old operas, witless tunes and artless rhythms.*" (My italics.) About 1910, among the cubists in Paris there commenced what has been called "the aestheticism of the circus," the appreciation and conversion of the art of the naive and uneducated classes—the backdrops of mountebanks, old inn-signs, popular prints. And during World War I, music in the hands of Satie and Stravinsky displayed a similar evaluation and commenced similar conversions—often in the interests of satire—of barrel-organ tunes, the timbers of street-pianos and street-orchestras—the musical effects of fairs and side-shows. Now: between Rimbaud and the cubist and dada and surrealist movements in the various arts there stands an individual who may be thought to have "transmitted" Rimbaud's message to our times. It is Guillaume Apollinaire, the poet and intellectual who fought the critical battles of cubism and anticipated dadaism and surrealism. Apollinaire's own work reveals his close observation of Rimbaud. A deal of his poetry was achieved by the famous discontinuous method developed by Rimbaud as a means to the visionary, dreamlike or hallucinatory. And it develops Rimbaldian themes: and Apollinaire also occupied himself with the edition of "erotic books innocent of spelling" of the type Rimbaud pretended to have enjoyed. . . . And Satie was a friend of Apollinaire's. . . .

But here is Britten with actual proof of an influence: proof indeed of its collaboration in a happy piece and in the happy development of a young composer. *Les Illuminations* is indeed the best of Britten's compositions earlier than his Michelangelo settings. Here besides is Britten with perhaps no proof that the Rimbaud-influence on music must continue, but something like a sign that it very well may. For his piece has revealed a consciousness of the poet growing among musicians. And conspicuously it has left to the hands of other composers the setting of most of the "Illuminations," the humorous and discontinuous prose-poems in particular: to other imaginations their suggestions of corresponding mutations possible in musical form, and corresponding swift rhythms and crystalline sonorities, possibly more fantastic than some of Schoenberg's.

ARTHUR MIZENER:

Yvor Winters

Mr. Winters is a critic of great ability, with a rare gift for sustained clarity of argument. His basic idea is this:

Now a poem is composed of words; that is, it is conceptual in its origin, and it cannot escape from its origin. A poem about a tree is composed primarily of abstractions, and secondarily of the feelings aroused by these abstractions: the tree, its leaves, its bark. . . . the poet's business is so to relate [these terms], that a single and definite idea emerges, in company with a mental image of some aspect of a tree, and in such a way that the feeling is communicated which is appropriate to the total idea-image both as a whole and with respect to each detail as one comes to it in reading.

The main point here is that the feeling communicated by a poem should be the feeling which is properly motivated by the conceptual content of the poem. Mr. Winters has no simple view of the difficulty of writing such a poem or of the complexity of the completed poem, which is, as he says, "a full and definitive account of a human experience."

The skill, consistency, and inclusiveness with which Mr. Winters elaborates and places in its ethical context this basic position is admirable, and it establishes in terms of our literature the rationalist critical position. It leads Mr. Winters back for admiration, not so much to the poets of the eighteenth century, as to poets like Gascoigne and Raleigh and Jonson. For all this he pays a price. It was Dryden who remarked, with that wonderful candor of his, that "our passions are, *or ought to be*, in our power" (the italics are mine). It was that same candor which led him frequently to recognize and honor what he did not know how to explain or justify: the remarks on Beaumont and Fletcher in *The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy* are an example. The result is that Dryden's judgments have stood up better than those of any other critic of his time and that his theoretical justifications of these judgments are often inconsistent. It was Rymer who achieved consistency. There is certainly a great deal more to be said for Rymer's position than the textbooks admit; yet it is true that Rymer not infrequently maintains his consistency at the expense of not seeing, or at least not admitting that he sees, what people are doing when they are not doing what he thinks they ought to. It is this kind of price, I think, that the rationalist critic pays, precisely as the price the opposite kind of critic pays is the inconsistency which comes from saying what he knows, even when he does not know how to explain it fully and so reconcile it with whatever else he knows.

Yet, though Mr. Winters may pay a price for his consistency, it seems to me a relatively small one most of the time, and the body of his criticism, which would be a considerable achievement in any time, is an even greater one when the age in which he produced it is taken into account. The essays on Henry Adams and Wallace Stevens in the present book* are brilliant analyses of these writers from Mr. Winters' point of view and bring into sharp focus a view of them which, so far as it goes, seems to me undeniably just and important.

Mr. Winters is less impressive when he seeks to analyze or, perhaps it would be more precise to say, demolish other critics. The least successful essay in his book is, I think, the essay on Mr. Eliot. Much of the time Mr. Winters, like Rymer, cannot, or will not, see what Mr. Eliot is trying to do. This is not to say Mr. Eliot's view is right and Mr. Winters' wrong; it is simply to say that Mr. Winters is not dealing with what Mr. Eliot means but with what Mr. Eliot's words, taken in their most literal sense, say. No one has suffered more than Mr. Winters from the failure of people to read him with sympathy; he complains, I think with some justice, for example, that Mr. Ransom has misread him on the subject of morality because of Mr. Ransom's preoccupation with his own views. And in just this way Mr. Winters misreads Mr. Eliot. For example, Mr.

*Yvor Winters: *The Anatomy of Nonsense*. New Directions.

Eliot, speaking of Dante's advantage in having the thinking of St. Thomas behind him and of Shakespeare's lack of any such support, says: "In truth, neither Shakespeare nor Dante did any real thinking—that was not their job; and the relative value of the thought current at their time, the material enforced upon each to use as the vehicle of his feeling, is of no importance." Now it is surely plain that Mr. Eliot means, by "real thinking," thinking of the kind St. Thomas did, means that both Dante and Shakespeare accepted the thought, in this sense, of their ages and were bound to accept it if they did not choose to devote their lives to philosophy. What he means by his final clause is reasonably clear from an earlier sentence: "from the point of view of poetry [the fact that "Dante had one coherent system of thought behind him"] is an irrelevant accident." Now this view of the matter may be incorrect, or it may imply a mistaken idea of the nature of poetry; but it is not what Mr. Winters says it is. His comment on the last clause of Mr. Eliot's remark is: "The last sentence, however, is emphatic, and it is emphatically anti-intellectual and deterministic at the same time. . . . We may observe from this that the quality of a writer's thought is at once enforced upon him and is irrelevant to the quality of his work."

Much of what Mr. Winters has to say about Mr. Eliot seems to me very much to the point, particularly as it has to do with Mr. Eliot's stressing of the way in which a poem may say more than a poet consciously intended and with his similar stressing of man's helplessness before "the damage of a lifetime." This may not, perhaps, be undone, but it can surely, as Mr. Winters suggests, be to some extent repaired. On the other hand, it is true that language and the human mind work in very odd ways and that we are all, up to a point at least, the victims of the world we live in. Mr. Eliot may be more willing to accept this situation than he ought to be; but Mr. Winters appears to be willing to ignore it altogether.

This appearance may be a matter of manner. Mr. Winters has a way of overstating his case which in the end leaves on the reader an impression of anger and irritation only partly under control. There is some evidence that Mr. Winters does not quite intend this effect, and it may simply be an over-development of the critical habit of stating complex judgments, with their variety of opportunities for error, as if they were simple facts about which it is inexcusable to err. It is nonetheless a discouragement to our belief in Mr. Winters' own ability to adjust feeling to motive. Either Mr. Winters' language is misrepresenting his feeling or there is some motive not represented in his discourse for the apparent savageness of remarks like the following: "Eliot displays a knowledge of the personal beliefs and motives of two poets of distant ages that can be matched for clairvoyance, I imagine, only by the perceptions of certain characters of Henry James. . . . Anyone who can take this sort of thing seriously is welcome to do so." This feeling sometimes approaches romantic irony: "[Theodore] Spencer in failing to note my criticism of these lines adhered rigidly to a convention of contemporary literary controversy against which it would ill become a very young writer like myself to protest."

Mr. Winters' verse* is distinguished, very skilful, and completely without that kind of flamboyance which mars so much contemporary verse. Some of it seems to me very impressive, for example, "The Manzanita," "Time and the Garden," "Much in Little," or "On the Portrait of an Italian Scholar of the Renaissance." At its best it demonstrates the virtues Mr. Winters most admires. To this extent it shows not only that Mr. Eliot is wrong, at least so far as poetry is concerned, about the damage of a lifetime, but that the new habits Mr. Winters is advocating are good ones. When it falters, it does so most often, I think, because the feeling is not, in Mr. Winters' terminology, appropriate to the idea-image with respect to some detail. I say this with some hesitation because this is a delicate matter, but I think Mr. Winters is wrong about airships, for example:

O spirit cool and frail!
Hung in the lunar fire!
Spun wire and brittle veil!
And trembling slowly higher!

*Yvor Winters: *The Giant Weapon*. New Directions.

This stanza should be observed in its context to do it full justice, for these terms are, I believe, appropriate to the thing Mr. Winters is trying to say in "October Nocturne"; but an airplane is, properly speaking, a tough and solid object, and though it may be hung on its prop, I do not believe it may be properly spoken of as hung in this way. Occasionally a poem of Mr. Winters' seems to me at fault because the feeling is inappropriate to the idea-image as a whole, for example, "To David Lampson"; but this is rarer and much more difficult to be at all sure of.

Mr. Winters has a special skill for making again available to poetry certain neglected older styles as in "Dedication for a Book"; with the possible exception of the final couplet, this exceedingly difficult task seems to me to be brought off with complete success. Sometimes, however, his diction seems uncertain:

And yet excitement swells me, vein by vein:
 I long to crowd the little garden, gain
 Its sweetness in my hand and crush it small
 And taste it in a moment, time and all!
 These trees, whose slow growth measures off my years,
 I would expand to greatness. No one hears,
 And I am still retarded in duress!

Whether "retarded in duress" is the result of Mr. Winters' special sensitiveness to diction of this kind in earlier poets or of a desire to achieve a certain phonetic effect, it seems to me to introduce a kind of diction incongruous with that to which the poem as a whole is committed.

On the whole, however, Mr. Winters' verse, like his criticism, seems to me to deserve a great deal more attention than it has generally received; if his verse is occasionally faulty, as I believe it is, so is all verse, and it is, as he says, "worth risking a few years of unsatisfactory composition in order to form new habits," if those habits are good ones. A fuller and fairer understanding of Mr. Winters would be the best possible cure for those deficiencies, more or less present in all of us, which make it so easy for us to underrate and even to disregard him.

J. V. HEALY:

BERNARD C. HEYL: *New Bearings in Esthetics and Art Criticism*. Yale University Press.

Mr. Heyl's thesis, briefly, is that if we apply the rules of semantics to esthetic criticism (by which he means criticism of the plastic arts, music and literature) it will be seen that when critics make "real" definitions about the nature of truth and art they are talking nonsense, and that, therefore, they should restrict their definitions to a "volitional" or tentative sort. Because his thesis is based on the work of the semanticists and neo-positivists it should be pointed out that to these thinkers a statement is usually true if it can be verified empirically by showing it to have a physical referent or to have a scientific relevance. Scientific relevance is based on the probability of a proposition's being true in direct ratio to the limiting proportion of cases in which it turns out to be true. This view of truth entirely ignores the fact that probabilities are not physical objects at all but objective degrees of evidence apprehended in terms of a perceptual consciousness of a degree of evidence. Mr. Heyl carefully qualifies his own theory of truth as "a combination of factual and logical truth, which has for its chief criterion accuracy, testability, and public verifiability."

Like other semanticists, however, he does not always adhere to the rules of clear and accurate definitions that must always precede propositions. One, if not indeed the chief, key word in his book is "precision," and it is used at times to mean grammatical clarity, at times to mean accurate correspondence with scientific fact, and at times simply to overawe the reader. More circumspect than Eliot and Matthiessen, who can fling this word about on the slightest provocation, Mr. Heyl

nevertheless does himself disservice by not defining such a word beforehand. He also uses the word "abstract," as when he refers to the work of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, when he really means "general," a consequence, I conjecture, of not having a clear and coherent idea of what the imagination can and cannot do in both art and science. The result is that his criticism of Croce's theory that intuitive knowledge is knowledge obtained through the imagination, that art is intuition and that intuition is also expression, seems ignorant of a good deal of the nature of art. "The answer," he summarily states, "is given by Croce himself when he announces his concern for 'a true and precise idea of intuition.'" I agree with Mr. Heyl that Croce cannot define intuition to satisfy the standards of precision that Mr. Heyl may have had in mind at the moment. But why blame Croce for using the word in a sense that Mr. Heyl himself sometimes 'falls into using?

Esthetic criticism is not science nor is it semantics. It does make propositions, but it does not care whether the proposition that Desdemona loves Cassio is or is not verifiable through either the Coherent or Correspondence theories of truth: it cares only whether the proposition Desdemona loves Cassio has by itself any esthetic appeal or dis appeal. Such propositions have a noetic significance and we can understand them for what they are, just as we can take the disc in the noonday sky to be more than our own experience of it; to be, in fact, the sun itself.

Finally, and this is to me the most telling point against psychological relativism, if there is such a thing as esthetic error, then, clearly, there is such a thing as esthetic truth. It would, for instance, have been an esthetic error for Yeats to have written instead of

maybe substance can be composite,
Profound McTaggart thought so . . .

this:

maybe substance can be composite,
Holy Jesus thought so . . .

It would be an esthetic error for a woman of normal sight to decorate with a thick purple carpet and orange velvet draperies her breakfast nook. It would also be an error, to say the least, for a ballerina who had been dancing "Swan Lake" to step out of routine and start doing the bumps. Psychological relativism is not interested in the poem as a poem, in interior decorating as an art, or in "Swan Lake" as a classical ballet. It is interested in something else, and that something, while it may be even more important than the object itself, is not art. The psychology of the artist, the study of individual taste must, if psychology really is a science, proceed to study individuals on the assumption that they are not individuals at all. The objectivist and organic theories of Croce, Venturi, Wheelwright, and Mrs. Langer which Mr. Heyl unconvincingly attacks may very well be shots in the dark, but at least they are in the direction of the object. Psychological relativism, which is shooting in the dark no less, shoots interminably in all directions.

PRUDENCIO DE PEREDA:

LILLIAN SMITH: *Strange Fruit*. Reynal and Hitchcock.

BEN FIELD: *The Outside Leaf*. Reynal and Hitchcock.

Lillian Smith's widely heralded first novel tackles some unstudied facets of the South's Negro problem. It tells an old story of a white man's love for a beautiful Negress, the inevitable "impasse," a brutal solution, and a lynching; but, in showing the relationship of each part of her community to these events, Miss Smith has opened new paths, shown some untouched causes and effects, and presented the most complete canvas on a lynching that we've ever read. Critics, with rare perception, have celebrated this (as has Boston with its banning) and showered the book with praise and respect.

I think there has been too much of both. While the writing has an expository clarity that is admirable and a full fund of knowledge, there is none of the incisive study of human beings, the free plot development, or the identification with its people that first-rate fiction demands, and,

while Miss Smith's history and background certainly point her up as one to know whereof she writes, she does little more than show us that she does know.

Strange Fruit, in fact, is not a novel, but rather a social tract presented in a new, interesting, and pleasing form. (For which, thanks! Many more will read it now.) The town of "Maxwell," Georgia, could well be Lillian Smith's home town, the people—white and black—her own neighbors and former servants. Certainly the surface knowledge of her characters shows that she has looked upon them long—with sympathy and feeling. She leads them through their everyday lives and through the long moments of one of their intermittent crises with a sure, accurate knowledge and true understanding, but here is the end of her powers. At no time does she seem able to answer the constant cry of her protagonists: "What can we do about it?" Rather, she seems to feel as they do—that they are locked under a system which can allow none but an evolutionary solution. Lynching of Negroes—kept at a safe, periodic low by the finer instincts of the South's true citizens—must needs be a safety valve of poor economics as the South builds itself slowly up from the Civil War morass. "Only thing I can see for anybody with sense," says Charlie Harris, the intelligent son of the well-meaning but powerless-to-act mill owner, "is to get out."

"Run away," his sister answers him. "Nice and easy!" No!—Charlie, too, must be held in by the traditional allegiance to the "system."

One of Miss Smith's real contributions to the literature of the Negro problem is her presentation of educated Negroes who take on the cloak of subservience in order to better aid their people. They end up more humiliated and beaten than any of the others. Sam Perry, the hopeful, collaborating Negro doctor, is a more pitiful figure than any of Faulkner's "odd" Negroes, than Caldwell's courageous Clem, than Wright's surly Bigger, and—what is more!—he lacks their satisfaction at having dented, however slightly, the smug, steel-like umbrella of the traditional "system."

The selfless integrity and fine courage set into Ben Field's work of the last fifteen years reap a first reward in his short novel, *The Outside Leaf*. It is as clean and compactly constructed as were the memorable short stories that appeared under his name in the experimental magazines. That, however, is its one deficiency: the story of Moe Miller's victory over a vital tobacco crop and his decisive break through the bonds of fanatic intolerance is told in the hard, succinct, always thrilling prose of Field's kind instincts, but it nowhere relates itself to any universal or important contemporary theme. As such it seems like just a long, excellent short story—with fine characterizations, sometimes superb writing, but with never an inkling of what lies without the periphery of the Connecticut Valley. Field must yet write his first important book.

MONA VAN DUYN:

STANLEY KUNITZ: *Passport to the War*. Henry Holt.

SAMUEL FRENCH MORSE: *Time of Year*. The Cummings Press.

The arrangement of Stanley Kunitz's book (first half, new poems which have come out of the war; second half, a reprint of his 1930 volume, *Intellectual Things*, now out of print) evokes a problem. When one group of poems, executed while the writer "stands in the center of that man's madness," and another group of non-topical lyrics are presented inside the same cover and by the same man, the difference in quality and tone between them cannot very easily be overlooked. The problem transcends criticism of Kunitz, of course. How is the writer who has come into technical control of his medium during a period of world war to make good poetry out of this confused and violent immediacy? If they were not juxtaposed with the crystal delicacy and excellence of his earlier lyrics, the *Passport to the War* poems could perhaps be acclaimed as a near success at doing it. But no, too much has clearly been lost.

The Hamlet-like "I" of these new poems is fatherless in his father's inadequacy in crisis and pre-crisis; he is alternately called on to revenge his sinned-against father and to answer for his father's sins. Many of the pieces, in order to affirm, do so through irony, inverted statement—"Endure? That is the dialect of love/the greenhorn of the West, my late companion." They wear a mask of bitter humor, in statement and rhythm—"Have mercy, boys, on the monkey in his box. / Dear Judas goat, lead out the sheep to slaughter"; or in metaphor—the war guns are a nymphomaniac who enjoys nothing so inexhaustibly as boys. Irony is too often a cover for self-pity. Yet how else may war affirmations be made, without the dishonesty of too-easy acceptance? Some of our young poets, with one kind of talent, are "finding themselves" in war writing. Dylan Thomas and Dunstan Thompson select facets which they treat with baroque imagery that dazzles like night artillery fire, yet solves the selected situation by setting it in a strong tension. But Kunitz is at his best when dealing with centralities, the relationship of the "I" to the universe; and

in the later verses, the ground has been swept from under his feet. Only in the last section of "Night Letter," which has the nostalgic sweetness in movement and imagery of "Dover Beach," does he achieve anything near his earlier "He," "Vita Nuova," "Night-Piece," etc. However, notwithstanding the problem (which is solved by neither Kunitz nor this critic) *Passport to the War* is an impressive collection.

Samuel Morse's volume, introduced by Wallace Stevens, is a promising first book. It is a perceptive record of New England mind and country—of the pheasants

. . . with that sweet idleness of time
To give to love as old and unamazed
As they themselves, the feathers touched with rime
And living jet and lively brown made clear,

and the track to the quaking bog, with

The sphagnum bearing the weight of the upper world
With so little strength it seemed self-treachery
To walk here and try the springing moss.

There are Frostian touches. Morse has his dry, deft irony at the human mind's elusiveness to scientific explanation, and "The Birthday Party and the Fire: a Record" is a dialogue with Frost's own minx-like slyness of meaning. But the poems are clean and authentic, dipping, with New Englander's skill, from color and texture of leaf, plumage, and snow to spiritual insight, and back again.

OTHER RECENT POETRY*

GEORGE BARKER: *Sacred and Secular Elegies*. New Directions.

In the past, Barker's work has suffered from diffuseness and lack of control; and these faults are not extirpated completely here. They are much abated, though. To making his subject significant (his subject is the war world, some aspects of it), providing us knowledge of it, Barker brings an unusual ability to point up, to arrest, to raise images into symbols. Sometimes he is more obscure than he needs to be, but his obscure passages usually repay digging at. His work deserves analysis to support the generalizations (so does any work worth reviewing, of course) but for the usual reasons of space and time the generalizations will have to stand: the intention for the deed.

W. R. M.

HARRY BROWN: *The Violent*. New Directions.

Brown knows many of the tricks of the trade, and uses them well. He makes clever use of other poets' devices of style, Auden's principally though by no means exclusively. He often titillates and stimulates. His work suggests, though, that Brown is a poet who, knowing pretty well how to do, hasn't yet a very clear idea of what to do—hasn't landed anywhere in particular—hasn't found his theme. That is not to say that no two of his poems are related. Several of them, including most of the imitations of Auden, say that the bogeyman will get you, whether you watch out or not. But the warning does not seem very serious. In the few poems out of Brown's experience in the army, just where one would expect it intensified if it were Brown's theme, it does not appear.

W. R. M.

HUBERT CREEKMORE: *The Stone Ants*. The Ward Ritchie Press.

In general, Creekmore writes best when he writes least pretentiously. His pretensions, when he makes them, are not undue or dishonest. While he can handle something direct and objective, however, his efforts to deal with abstractions, or complicated emotions, almost invariably produce an effect of blur and strain. His rhythms are erratic, and his images, where they should be most firm to sustain the structure of his poem, go mushy. What he intends is praiseworthy; the trouble is simply that his command of his craft does not as yet match his intentions.

W. R. M.

*In a season abounding in new volumes of poetry, it has been necessary to review some of them much more briefly than we or our readers would like. These reviews are the work of W. R. Moses and Marion Carr, former editors of the quarterly, and Kerker Quinn. A few recent volumes have been kept back for ampler review in the Summer issue: notably those by E. E. Cummings, Robert Penn Warren, and Robert Fitzgerald.

JAMES DALY: *Poems 1923-1943*. Dryden Press.

Out of two decades in which the major literary voices have been impelled by anger, in one form or another, at man for not being better than he is, comes the collection of James Daly's poetry, subtle, polished, witty, exact in imagery and diction, but incomprehensible to ears attuned to anger. There is timeless which is disturbing to the time-bound reader. There is prayer for forgetfulness of war and cruelty and death ("Salvage This," "World War I," "Litany"). There is great strength in "Palimpsest," a brilliant parody, and "The Savage God." What is lacking is ethical judgment. To denounce the lack of it in a work of art is perhaps to indict the snow for not giving a damn whom it falls on. But for many readers Daly's conscious apartness will be a little too far out on the thin edge of escapism to make for comfortable reading this year, this generation.

M. C.

DAVID GASCOYNE: *Poems 1937-1942*. Nicholson and Watson (London).

It is regrettable that this is not an American, and therefore more readily available, edition of a poet who began appearing in our magazines in the early 'thirties (when he was but sixteen)—as soon as Auden and Spender, ahead of Thomas and Barker, whom he more nearly resembles. Gascoyne's six-year collection shows him to be neither prolific nor very even in quality—he is, for one thing, overly addicted to lurid vocabulary: *ghastly*, *convulsion*, *hurtled*, etc. Yet there is much unstrained excitement, much clean sensitivity in his work. Before ordering his volume from London upon this recommendation, the reader might sample "Misere" (here called "Ecce Homo") as printed in Oscar Williams' 1943 anthology.

K. Q.

ALFRED HAYES: *The Big Time*. Howell, Soskin.

Alfred Hayes has the right touch for a Manhattan historian, London-born though he be. Abetted by the populous, Hogarthian drawings of Beatrice Tobias, his verse jaunts through the city from "Union Square" (the opening poem) to "A Nice Part of Town" (the last), sketching the inevitable rented rooms, bars, dancehalls, offices, subways, thick-curtained mansions, and their assorted occupants. His approach is, refreshingly, not a poet's but that of an ordinary guy who knows the score and indulges in sympathy, resentment, suspicion, detection of incongruities, and the conviction that the world he lives in is dying. But Hayes is not consistently enough interested in the craft of poetry to stand beside Crane or Fearing. Sometimes the effects he works for are merely the obvious paraphernalia of depression verse or the lyrics in a Federal Theatre revue. Especially do the semi-narrative pieces falter, their biting details of description and characterization lost in an artless struggle to "capture the drama" (as the jacket blurb boasts) of New York living.

K. Q.

WELDON KEES: *The Last Man*. Colt Press.

Kees' work demonstrates a fairly consistent point of view—guilt, and weakness, and general going to pot. One does not find in him that distressing unbalance that comes from having virtuosity but little to say, or else from having beautiful ideas but not the means to implement them. What he wants to do and what he knows about doing it are equal and integrated enough so that neither points up the other by its own feebleness. There is some sharpness and freshness to most of Kees' poems.

W. R. M.

JOHN RUSSELL MCCARTHY: *Enrico Considers*. James A. Decker.

An unqualified recommendation that you should read this book. Perhaps Enrico is, or is merely the creation of, John Russell McCarthy. He is also enlightened Everyman, Everyman in the sense that the biological, psychological, mystical, and marketplace things which happen to all of us Enrico records; enlightened in that he comes to terms with life without calling it either good or bad. The outstanding quality of McCarthy's work is his stoical and yet sympathetic humor and unusually adult wit. Life has brought him to an impassioned understanding at which he neither coos in wonder nor storms in disapproval. The reader will smile much, not laugh; think sober thoughts, not cry.

M. C.

ANNE RIDLER: *Cain*. Nicholson and Watson.

Carrying coals to Newcastle, Anne Ridler fetches too many lumps in too large a wagon. Since Milton the Eden story has been the vehicle for major philosophical argument (*vide* Moody's *Death of Eve*). Unfair though such a comparison may be, nevertheless the poet is answerable for her choice of a story from which the practiced reader expects inspired verse and the affirmation of passionate belief. With tired rhetoric, abounding in clichés of both idea and phrase, with no dramatic conflict (Abel is a willing, almost eager victim), *Cain* fails as drama, as poetry, and stands in the weariness of its commonplace message as a monument to a generation disabused of its visions and for the nonce soul-sick and unalarmed.

M. C.

FRANCIS COLEMAN ROSENBERGER: *The Virginia Poems*. Gotham Book Mart.

Rosenberger restrains his subjects, and the effects he proposes, rather narrowly. His poems sometimes seem, especially in the early part of the book (the arrangement is roughly chronological), too little and too neat. But, though demonstrating no large imaginative grasp nor great technical skill, he often approaches his subjects with precision and attention that make his poems at least pleasant.

W. R. M.

THEODORE SPENCER: *An Act of Life*. Harvard University Press.

Spencer is the contemplative poet, the man whose solemn analysis of self and society, earnest compliment, and unashamed wonder turn to facile-seeming lyric or didactic verse. The manner is traditional, the lyrics as simple in their symbolism as "The Clod and the Pebble," the longer poems texturally reminiscent of "Character of the Happy Warrior." He is most at home, I think, in the more sober pieces—such as "Heritage," dealing memorably with the poet's predicament and prospects in a day "When the news that best can please / Is news of mangled enemies"—wherein the pace is ambling, the language largely unaffected by contemporary idiom; certainly the lighter sections of "The Alumni" seem thick-thumbed in their gestures toward popular speech. A good ear, a clear and far-inquiring mind, and a venturesome (if not invariably happy) choice of metaphor make Spencer's first sizable collection of verse deeply rewarding.

K. Q.

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